A MISUNDERSTOOD HERO

MARY·BARNES·BEAL

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"I am holding on father." — p. 14

A Misunderstood Hero

By
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A Misunderstood Hero

CHAPTER I

THE MEETING AT GLEN ELSWORTH

In and out among a crowd of jostling men, women and children, shouting hackmen, surly baggagemen, piles of trunks, boxes, baskets, and freight of all descriptions, I wended my way. I had just stepped from the car at the station of Millwood and felt anxious and forlorn. I was looking for a certain light blue vehicle with a black top, which I had been led to expect would be somewhere about the station to meet this train.

Presently I perceived it at a little distance, with a black man sitting on the driver's seat, and a white man standing at the horses' heads. At the very moment my eyes fell on this latter individual he saw me, too, and with instinctive knowledge of my wants, left his horses, and with a loud "Coach, mum? Yes, mum, comin', mum," came leaping up to the platform, jumping over a trunk here and a hen-coop there, until he reached the place where I stood.

"Coach, mum?" he said again, all out of breath.

"I wish to take the coach that goes up into the mountains," I said. "I have forgotten its name. Is that it over there?"

"Yes, mum; sure, mum. The Mount Eyre coach. To the hotel, mum?"

"No, it is to a Mrs. Dale's house that I wish to go. Do you know the place?" I asked anxiously, for I was all alone, and certainly did not care to start upon a rough, jolting ride up the mountains for nothing.

"Oh, yes, mum. Glen Elsworth, mum. Come on, mum, it's only a step to the coach, mum," he said encouragingly. "I'll just put ye in, mum, and git your trunks, and off's the word, mum. Checks, mum?"

"You are sure it is all right and you know the place? Mrs. Dale's, somewhere near the village of Dingley up in the mountains. I have never been there."

"Yes, mum! Sure, mum! It's all right, mum. We go by there every day. Glen Elsworth. Fine place, mum. Right in here on the back seat, mum. Now you're all right, mum."

Perhaps I was, but I felt decidedly all wrong and bewildered, for I was only a little old maid, with my fifty-fifth birthday well behind me, somewhat timid, and quite unused to traveling alone. It was an unheard-of undertaking for

me, this starting out to find a lonely farmhouse high up in the Blue Ridge Mountains. I had expected a companion, but at the last moment she had failed me, and I would not at that late day alter my plans, when my arrangements were all made and word of my speedy coming had been sent to the mistress of Glen Elsworth.

As I sat in the corner of the coach, waiting for my trunks to be strapped on, I felt, as I have said, quite anxious and forlorn. The thought of the rough mountain road, which I had heard was, though not exactly perilous, yet trying to the strongest woman's nerves, made me tremble, and I was also afraid of the black driver,—of his ability as a coachman, I mean; for he himself was a benevolent looking old uncle. I felt myself growing every moment more nervous and frightened as I sat back in my corner, waiting for the genial proprietor of the coach to complete his leisurely disposition of my modest baggage.

Suddenly I heard him shouting again, "Coach, sir? Yes, sir, here it is, sir. Comin', sir." And with a violent cracking of his fingers and waving of his hat to attract some one's attention, off he started.

Glancing out I saw a tall man in a gray suit looking about somewhat eagerly, as I had myself been doing a few moments before. Near him stood a lady, also tall and very graceful, quietly

but fashionably clad in a traveling dress of brown. By her side was a young girl of fourteen or fifteen and a boy of possibly eleven years of age.

When my eyes had once rested on this boy they would not leave him. I thought that in all my life I had never seen so handsome a lad. Of the lady and the girl I could form little idea, for their traveling hats and veils shaded their faces; but there was nothing in the boy's cap perched carelessly on the back of his sunny curls, to hide his broad forehead with its finely-arched eyebrows and the dancing blue eyes beneath. He was looking about him in wide-awake fashion, chattering and apparently bestowing his valuable advice upon his elders as to the next best step, just as I had seen boys like him do a hundred times before. Nobody paid any attention to him, however. The gentleman stepped forward to meet the coach proprietor, who, after some preliminary conversation, ushered the whole party to where the black driver and I awaited them.

I now saw that there was another person with them whom I had not before observed. It was a little lame boy, probably a year or two younger than the other. He was not handsome like the first boy. One leg seemed to be a little shorter than the other, while aside from his lameness, naturally the first thing to attract a stranger's

notice, he was near-sighted, and although he wore glasses, he seemed to find it necessary to walk with his head bent a little forward. His whole attitude, as he walked on after the others, contrasted unfavorably with that of his graceful brother—if he were his brother. Then, too, the younger boy's face had a sullen, downcast aspect. Altogether I did not like his appearance at all. But the first boy, who had by this time reached the coach and stood looking frankly and brightly up at me with his wide blue eyes, was like a young king, and I could not resist giving him a smile and a "Good-morning, here is a place for you next to me."

He touched his cap, or the place where his cap should have been, and answered with a merry smile and a "Good-morning," too.

"I'll wait for father," he said, and by this time they had all come up.

It was easy to see that it was "father" indeed, who had come to the side of the coach and was looking for comfortable seats within. Never were father and son more alike than this tall, fine-looking man and my young friend. I took the gentleman to be forty, or forty-five, for there were gray hairs here and there about his head and moustache and a few lines of care, if not of age, upon the brow and at the corners of the eyes. He had an intellectual, thoughtful face, unusually grave and even sad. I set him down

at once as a professional man, and probably a scholar.

The lady, too, was a person of very distinguished appearance. Although no longer young, her face might still have been called beautiful had not a haughty and somewhat sour expression marred the effect of the regular features and fair, smooth complexion. As for the girl, she was like many another maiden of fifteen, plump and fair, with a fresh, rosebud face and merry blue eyes. She was not, however, so strikingly handsome as her father and brother, though a strong family likeness assured me she was daughter to one and sister to the other.

"Here, Margaret," said the gentleman, turning to the lady to assist her. "You and Madge take the back seat and the boys and I will just fill the other. Going to have it all to ourselves, I see, with plenty of room—— Ah! I beg pardon, madam," he added, in some confusion. "I did not see that there was a lady already here," and he glanced at his party a little puzzled, as if he were counting heads and wondering where he had best stow them and their numerous bags, baskets, guns, fishing-tackle and the like.

I am so small that it was not strange he had not observed me sitting well back in my dark corner. I now hastened to say:

"But I am sure, sir, there will be plenty of room. Let the two little boys sit back with me,

and that will leave two seats free for the rest of your party and the driver."

"But I am afraid my boys will crowd you too much," he objected politely.

"Not in the least," I returned. "I shall like to have them here."

"But, father," said the boy with the bright face, "I must sit by you or the driver. I must see things. I can't be shut up in there on that back seat."

"Nonsense!" said his father, a little impatiently. "Here, in with you. Don't keep us waiting."

But my young hero still hung back. His face had clouded, and there was an ugly pout on his lips. He pushed the other boy forward a little. "Let Frank sit there," he said. "I'll sit by the driver."

His father was about to insist with some firmness upon his young son's obedience, when the lady interposed.

"O Francis, let him do as he pleases. Of course he can't enjoy himself so well on the back seat. I think if the lady does not object, there will be room for Madge and Frank with her."

She looked at me inquiringly and, I thought, a little haughtily, which was perhaps her natural manner with every one.

"All right," said the gentleman, after I had again assured them of the abundance of room on

the back seat, "all right, but I am afraid we are giving in too much to our young man up there."

He glanced to the driver's seat, where "Bright-eyes," as I had already dubbed him in my mind, sat aloft, with the smiles back on his face, his cap off, the fresh June air blowing about his sunny curls.

"Never mind, I like to see him happy," said the lady, and she too glanced up at him fondly.

"Here, Madge," said her father, "it is your turn next."

"No, father, put Frank in first. I want to sit in the corner where I can see something," objected Madge. "Aunt Margaret, make Frank sit in the middle."

"Here, Frank," said Aunt Margaret, "where are you? Lagging behind, as usual—never at hand when you're wanted," she commented impatiently.

Frank, who had been standing a little way from the others, holding a small dog tightly in his arms and showing no interest whatever in the proceedings of the eager party about him, now came forward, with his head down and a sullen look on his face, called there, perhaps, by his aunt's cross little speech.

He gave one glance at the seat beside me, which showed as plainly as words could do, that it was no more acceptable to him than to any one else; but he said nothing, and clambering up

rather awkwardly with his father's help, placed himself by my side, with the little dog still clasped in his arms.

No one seemed to take any further notice of him. Madge was helped into the other corner, the lady and gentleman took their places, all the baskets and other traps were safely stowed away, and at last the driver cracked his whip. The genial proprietor, after having several times assured the lady called Aunt Margaret that the horses were safe, that the road was as good a one as ever was made, and that the driver knew every inch of it, started us off with a flourish of hand and hat and a cordial, "Mornin', mum, mornin', sir. A pleasant trip, mum." And away we went.

We drove along quite comfortably for a mile or two until we turned from the highway and entered upon a narrow, winding road, with a great, green mountain looming up a little way ahead of us. The sun had been almost too warm until we came into this road, if road it could be called, which wound in and out among oaks and birches and chestnuts, with here and there a northern pine. On either side were waving sumacs and chinkapin bushes all in flower, while many little mountain rivulets glanced in the sunlight and sped among the ferns and mosses and low, creeping plants which grew close to the very horses' feet.

But I rode in too much fear and trembling to enjoy the beauties of this woodland journey. And so it was with the lady called Aunt Margaret. Again and again she admonished the driver to use more care when we came to the rougher parts of the road.

"You will certainly have us all over into this ditch," she cried sharply to him once. "Do look where you are going! Mercy on us!" she exclaimed, as the horses came stumbling out of a hole and mounted to a steep bank, to avoid what appeared to be another yawning chasm.

For a moment we seemed in such peril that involuntarily we all screamed, and young "Bright-eyes'" father called out to him sharply, "Hold on up there, Philip, or you 'll be off in the ditch." But in another second the horses reached the road again, the old wagon righted itself, and we could allow ourselves to breathe freely once more.

"Hold on, Philip," said his father once more.

"I am holding on, father," sang out Philip. "Do n't you be afraid. It 's jolly up here!"

At this the little lame boy moved uneasily, as if he, too, would have enjoyed sitting aloft where it was so "jolly," and where he could have seen something besides his father's broad shoulders and the back of his Aunt Margaret's bonnet.

He said nothing, however, but drew his dog, a small, bright-eyed fox-terrier, closer within his arms, as if to comfort it; for the little fellow

was evidently smitten with terror at his unaccustomed mode of traveling.

Our good-natured old driver all along took great pains to assure us of the perfect safety of the road. Once when we came to an unusually bad spot he turned round in his seat to comfort us.

"Doan ye be so feared, ladies, now doan ye," he said. "Dis hain't not'in', dis hain't. Der 's on'y one reely bad place on dis yer road, an' dat 's jes' fo' ye come ter de gulch, an' I 'll take ye troo dar all right. Doan ye be feared."

We came after wearisome climbing to that "bad bit er road." I have no words at my command to describe what we thought it. I will only say that when our poor old coach, creaking in every joint, finally emerged from the last deep pit of slush and mire and stones to the dry and comparatively level road, no one remained within it save the driver, the little lame boy and myself. The gentleman had elected to walk, ostensibly to lighten the load; Philip had also alighted for the sake of being with his father; and the aunt and niece had preferred to pick their way around the mud puddles and clamber over rocks rather than risk life and limb in the coach with us. As for me, I could not, had I wished it, have scrambled over rock and bush and brier. Nor could my little lame companion. He sat silently by my side, holding his dog in his arms, stroking it

softly now and then, as if to give it courage. I had not heard him speak until, in a worse jolt than usual, he said, almost in a whisper, to his little burden:

"Be good, Laddie. Don't be afraid; I'll take care of you."

Once, when the coach gave a sudden lurch and threatened to pitch both boy and dog off the seat, I put my arm about the lad's shoulders.

"Let me hold you, my dear, while you hold your dog," I said, "for fear you may fall."

He looked up quickly, as if astonished, then flushing, hung his head down in an awkward way. He said nothing at first, but in a moment I heard the words "Thank you," spoken low, and after a little while I caught his astonished glance at my face again, though I could not tell why he should have seemed surprised at such a trifling act of kindness.

"Are you frightened, my dear?" I asked.

"Not very much," he answered, hesitatingly, as if too shy to talk. "Laddie is frightened, though," he ventured after a little pause.

"Is he your dog?" I asked.

"Oh, no, he is Philip's dog, but he stays with me."

"He is a pretty little fellow," I said, patting the dog's head; at which the boy seemed pleased and almost smiled. He said no more, however, nor did I, for the coach, just then having over-

come the chief perils of the way, stopped to wait for the other passengers to get in.

After this, the road proving quite smooth and the horses being able to trot on evenly and briskly, we all felt our troubles at an end. Our spirits rose accordingly, and I soon found myself conversing quite merrily with Madge, helped occasionally by a word from her father or aunt.

"And you are going to Glen Elsworth, too?" said Madge inquiringly.

"Yes, indeed," I answered. "Is that your destination also? I supposed you must be going farther up the mountain to the hotel."

"Oh, no," she said, "some of Aunt Margaret's friends went to Glen Elsworth last summer, and they said it was so lovely there that we must go too. So now we're going, and to stay all summer."

"So am I," I replied, pleased that I was not to lose sight of people in whom I was already so interested.

"I think," said the gentleman, turning in his seat, "that as we have already become somewhat acquainted in our long ride over the mountains, it will be quite the proper thing for us to introduce ourselves without delay. My name is Francis Sinclair. This is my sister, Mrs. Archer, and my daughter Madge sits beside you."

"And I'm Philip," broke in the boy on the driver's seat.

"Oh, yes, of course Philip is not to be left out," laughed his father.

"My name is Agatha Poppelheimer," I said, in my turn, "and I shall be greatly pleased to make the better acquaintance of my fellow travelers and hope that we may have a happy summer together."

This was a long speech for me to make, for I have always been somewhat shy with strangers. In this case I felt an additional nervousness at hearing a quickly suppressed titter from Madge's corner when I mentioned my name. I know it is a singular one, but I am not ashamed of it. Perhaps there are reasons why, in my own quiet way, I may even be proud of it—at least of some who have borne it. However, that has nothing to do with my story.

"You are thinking I have a funny name, Miss Madge," I said with a smile.

Madge blushed. "Oh, I did not mean to"—— she began and paused in confusion.

"Never mind, my dear," I said reassuringly. "You are not the first who has found it odd and 'too much of a mouthful,' as some one once said. You must do as all my friends do; call me Miss Agatha, if you will. That is what I like best."

"I am sure I shall like that," said Madge.

"This is your brother, too?" I said, placing my hand on the lame boy's shoulder.

"Oh, yes, that's Frank," said Madge rather carelessly. "He and Philip are twins."

"Is it possible?" I asked in astonishment, for he was so much smaller and different in every way.

"Yes, they are twins, but they are not alike in anything. I wish they were. We think there is no one like Philip, Miss Agatha," said Madge with an admiring glance at Philip, where he sat chattering away to the driver with his cap off and the wind blowing his curls about his face.

I glanced suddenly down at Frank. His face was bent, but I could see a flush on his cheek, and when he lifted his head there was a frown on his brow and he looked cross and unhappy. I did not like to see such a look on a young lad's face, and yet I could not wonder that his sister's careless words had brought it there.

"Look dar," said the driver. "Dar is Glen Elsworth ober dar under de mountain wid de sunshine on it."

We all looked in the direction indicated by the driver's whip, and saw, nestled under a great green mountain, with a velvety lawn stretching away on three sides of it, a large, old-time Southern manor-house. The contrast of its bright white walls with the dark, waving oaks, chestnuts and other forest trees of the steep hill which seemed to loom up almost against it at the back, was very pleasing, and after the long journey

over the rough mountain roads, it seemed a very haven of peace.

It was one o'clock when, tired and travel-stained, we alighted from our old coach and ascended the steps of the house to find its mistress standing at her door to welcome us.

She was a tall, slight woman of middle age, with a pale face and a sad droop of the mouth; but just now a hospitable smile lighted up her countenance, and she looked so sweet and bright that I felt my heart warm toward her at once.

"Come in," she said, after the hand-shakes and the brief introductions were over. "Come into the parlor and rest a bit before going to your rooms, for I know how tiresome you must have found that long ride."

But, weary as we were, we all preferred to seek our rooms at once, there to remove some of the traces of our journey before being ushered into the dining-room to meet the other guests, who, as Mrs. Dale informed us, had just sat down to dinner.

Alone in my chamber, I looked about me with a sigh of thankfulness. This large, cool room was just suited to my mind, and I deemed it a pleasant promise of the rest and comfort the summer should bring.

A glance from each of the windows showed mountains, mountains everywhere. Directly in front of the house, though perhaps a quarter of a

mile away, there ascended from Mrs. Dale's lawn, by a gradual slope, an immense peak so high that, near though it must have been, the rounded top took on certain grayish-green and shadowy blue tints I should not have looked for at that distance. I could see the road along which we had come curving past the house, then among the trees, far up this mountain, until it reached the top. There in a broad clearing stood a large building all windows and verandas, with a flag waving from a tall cupola. This I knew must be the hotel of which I had heard, and that the mountain was the Mount Eyre our coachman had mentioned in the morning.

However, there was no time now to look at the lovely views about me. I hastened my toilet, and with such success that I was the first one in the parlor and had time for a brief chat with Mrs. Dale before Mrs. Archer and Madge, then Philip and Frank (the former with a bright, eager look on his face, the latter silent with eyes downcast, as usual) came in, followed by Mr. Sinclair.

Mrs. Dale now led the way to the dining-room. It is always an awkward moment with me when I have to enter a room full of people quite unknown to me; but in this case there was nothing to trouble even the most timid person, for no one was there but a lady and a little boy two or three years old. Every one had gone except this

young mother, who sat waiting for her son to finish his dessert.

She was a trim little woman with a pleasant face, and her boy might have been a pretty enough child if seen under more favorable circumstances. But just now, perhaps from the fact that he had already eaten as much as he wished, or that his dessert—a piece of some kind of juicy fruit pie—was not quite to his taste, he had apparently given up all attempts to bestow it where it properly belonged and was engaged in dabbling his hand in the juice and spreading it all over his cheeks and forehead and even his hair and ears. He was, in consequence, a frightful looking little object, and his mother, evidently feeling him to be so, started up hastily at our entrance, and seizing the child with such force as to knock over his high chair, turned and fled through the side door.

Mrs. Dale apologized for the untimely flight of the lady and her little son. "It is a Mrs. Todd from Philadelphia," she said. "Her husband is a naval officer who is just now absent on a voyage. She is a sweet little lady, and Johnny is a very sweet child, too, only he is perhaps rather spoiled by his mother and his aunts. They are her two sisters and are here with her to help in the care of her two boys. That is the other boy," she added, as a merry, freckled face, surmounted by a mass of stiff, fiery hair, suddenly

passed by the window, and glanced in curiously at Philip and Frank. All we could see was the head of this individual, but I thought it must be attached to a form of about Philip's size, and later acquaintance proved me right.

"That is Ralph," resumed Mrs. Dale; "a bright boy but a great rogue; and the two children are quite a handful for little Mrs. Todd and her sisters, I assure you."

Here Ralph, who seemed to have important business which took him past the open window frequently, appeared again, and glancing about sharply with a pair of keen, gray eyes, suddenly singled out Philip from the rest of the party, and giving him a grin and a wink, vanished again.

Philip grinned too over his dinner. Presently, he exclaimed with a sigh of satisfaction, as if a lingering doubt had just been dispelled:

"Well, this is something like! I know now I'm going to like Glen Elsworth."

We all laughed, and Mrs. Dale said: "Indeed, I hope so, my boy. I am sure it will not be Ralph's fault if you do n't, for he has been longing for your arrival ever since we got your father's letter."

"Come, Frank, hurry up!" urged Philip. "I want to get out and see what the place is like."

"What that boy is like, you mean," said his father.

Frank, who sat next to me, went on eating

his dinner in his usual silent manner, taking no notice of Philip's remark. That young gentleman suddenly pushed his chair from the table shouting, "'Scuse me, please," to the world at large, and vanished from our sight, not heeding his aunt's affectionate caution: "Do be careful, my dearest, not to get lost in the woods."

The next moment she turned to Frank and said in a disgusted, injured tone: "Frank, why cannot you sit up and *try*, at least, to eat like a gentleman? Munching away with your nose in your plate! You make me ashamed of you every day of your life."

Frank straightened himself up, and that slow flush of mortification and wounded pride accompanied by the obstinate, sullen look which I had seen before, crept over his face. Though he said no word, I heard him draw in his breath quickly, as if something hurt him.

For my part I could not wonder. It was true he seemed a child of gloomy, unhappy, even ugly disposition, judging from his appearance, but even if he had been the worst boy in the world, was this the treatment he should receive from those to whom he should have been the nearest and dearest? Was it just to alter so quickly that soft, coaxing entreaty and the glance of loving pride which the aunt had given one brother to the harsh tone and look of contemptuous dislike with which she publicly corrected the other's

little fault, if fault it could be called? He was very near-sighted, and had perhaps too carelessly fallen into an awkward posture, but I had noted his quiet, well-bred manner of eating, and to my mind there had been nothing to call for the open rebuke which his aunt had so cruelly administered before two strangers like Mrs. Dale and myself.

My heart quite ached for the little fellow when I saw that he had stopped eating his pie, and now sat with his hand clenched in his lap and a scowl on his face.

I could not refrain from placing my hand gently upon his shoulder and saying, "I think we shall like Glen Elsworth, don't you, Frank?"

He shrank from my touch, and glanced up at me as if I had been his worst enemy.

"It's no use, Miss Agatha," whispered Madge on my other side; "nobody can do anything with him. We just have to let him alone."

Well, perhaps it was so; perhaps he was a hopelessly ill-tempered, obstinate boy, hating and hated by everybody, even those who should have been closest to him, and yet there was something about him which was beginning to rouse my sympathy. He was certainly very repellent in his attitude when I tried to be kind, and looked as if his heart were full of hatred; yet I remembered how tender he had been toward his little

dog in the coach. I was sure his Aunt Margaret had been far from kind to him just now.

However, I remembered that I must not attempt to judge my neighbors on such short acquaintance. Nevertheless, as we rose from the table, I resolved that I would be as kind to my strange little table-mate as he would permit me to be, and I hoped that in some way I might help to make a happier look come into his face.

Directly after dinner Mrs. Dale led us out to the broad porch, where was waiting a young girl with an eager, expectant look, as if she, like the boy who had passed the window so often, were curious concerning the new boarders. This was Gertrude, Mrs. Dale's only daughter, a graceful girl with a sweet face like her mother's. She was about Madge's age, and I was sure—of what actually came to pass—that in a few days they would become inseparable companions.

Well up the mountain in front of us, upon the winding road I have already mentioned as leading to the hotel, we could descry two small forms already walking close together, and were thus assured that Philip and the boy with the twinkling eyes and the red locks had not waited for an hour to elapse before becoming as familiar as if they had known each other all their lives.

They seemed to be pairing off very naturally,

Madge and Gertrude, Philip and Ralph; but where was there a mate for Frank?

I looked about for him, but he was not on the porch, and I had not observed him when we left the dining-room.

"Where is your brother Frank, Miss Madge?" I asked. "He did not go with Philip, it appears."

"Oh, no, they never are together much," she said carelessly. "Frank can't walk fast, and Philip does n't like to keep back for him. I do n't myself," she added. "It 's dreadfully tiresome to wait for Frank when we want to go anywhere. So he just stays by himself. No one pays any attention to what he does, Miss Agatha; he just amuses himself."

Well, if he could amuse himself perhaps it was all right, but it seemed a lonely way for a child to live.

That evening at the supper-table we met Mrs. Todd, apparently for the first time; also her son Johnny in beautiful white array, with the loveliest reddish gold curls, the fairest skin, the rosiest cheeks and the pearliest little teeth in the world —a very cherub of a boy, looking like a perfect angel, as Madge confided to me. No one could have imagined that the frightful, bloody-looking little monster we had seen at dinner and this beautiful child could be one and the same.

Mrs. Todd's two maiden sisters, both considerably older than herself, were grouped near

her and Johnny, to whom, it was plainly to be seen, their whole attention, at the table at least, was given. We had been at supper only a few moments when we all agreed that it was imperative that he should have it.

I have seen many spoiled children in my life, but I never saw one like Johnny Todd. He could not have been more than three years old, but already his sway over his relatives was absolute. When Johnny's arm with its clenched fist flew up, and the little foot came down hard on the round of his high chair, and the rosebud mouth opened for a prolonged roar, Johnny got everything on the table that he wanted, whether it was rich cake and preserves, or catsup in his bread and milk. And all around him glasses jingled, dishes clicked and spoons thumped the table, the poor little mild aunties and the patient mother trying to deaden the noise and quiet the young tyrant as best they might.

But in spite of everything Johnny was such a pretty boy, with ways sometimes so winning and loving, that no one could help liking him. Before we had known him a week we were almost as devoted to him as his mother and aunts, except Mrs. Archer, who could never tolerate misconduct at the table, of all places, and Mr. Sinclair, who looked upon him, apparently, as belonging to some species of animal far removed from human beings.

At supper we also met for the first time Mrs. Dale's son, John, a young man of twenty-two, with a strong face and clear gray eyes, who presided at the table with much dignity and ease for so young a person.

It was a real relief to me to find that these were all the strangers we had to meet, as Mrs. Dale expected to receive no other guests during the summer.

It was June and the days were long. After supper, we elders sat out on the lawn until the sun had set and the stars came out, resting from our rough journey and gradually becoming better acquainted as we watched Johnny's gambols on the grass. Finally, when that young gentleman had been coaxed to bed by promises of "something good" from each of the sisters, we still sat watching the stars and listening to a belated wood-thrush singing in the wood behind us. Madge and Gertrude were in a hammock chatting quietly together. We could hear the voices of Philip and Ralph up in the mountain on our right. But I saw nothing of Frank, and no one else seemed to miss him. After a time my eye fell on a certain large stump, which had been converted into a comfortable seat and placed under a locust near the corner of the house. There I could just discern the little form of Frank. He was sitting very quietly holding his sleeping dog in his arms and looking up into the

woods where now and then Philip and Ralph could be seen playing among the trees.

Again I felt a pang of pity pass through my heart. He seemed lonely and forlorn sitting there with only his little dog for a companion.

CHAPTER II

RALPH, HIS DOINGS AND MISDOINGS

We had not been many days at Glen Elsworth before becoming acquainted with the history not only of its mistress, but of her ancestors as well. It was Mrs. Dale's great-grandfather who had planned and built the house, selecting its site with taste and wisdom, laying out the lawn with shrubs the descendants of which still bloomed for us in masses of great white snowballs, of gorgeous peonies and fragrant honeysuckles and roses. It was his hand, too, which had planted the tender saplings now standing about us as great oaks and tulip trees, with here and there a sturdy chestnut or towering poplar.

In the dining-room was a faded portrait of this fine old Southern gentleman, and when I looked into his kindly face I felt that I should like to take him by the hand and thank him for all he had done for lovely Glen Elsworth; for had not I, as well as his own immediate posterity, been made rich by the presence of the comfort and beauty he had created? I must not linger to speak of the changes which had taken place in this once rich and flourishing family before what remained

of all its wealth and lands fell to this one, slender woman, who now, in her quiet, dignified way, made us welcome to her pleasant home. It was evident that though what was left to her of land and stock furnished a modest living, there was little ready money, and no doubt it was a happy thought which had prompted her to open the house to boarders.

After the death of her husband she had carried on her farm herself, with the counsel she could obtain from friends and trusted servants, until her son had grown into a young man strong and willing to lift the burdens from her shoulders, and every one could see how anxious he was to shield his mother from every care.

Gertrude, also, by her gentle, womanly ways and sweet, thoughtful face, gave promise of becoming in her turn a prop and comfort to her mother as the years should pass.

We saw little of either Gertrude or Madge during the first days of our stay. The wild roses were in full bloom and beautiful clumps of laurel and rhododendrons were still to be had for the seeking, and these young girls thought nothing of clambering about the mountains in search of the finest bunches with which to fill all the vases and bowls, and even old, cracked pitchers, which the house afforded; meanwhile telling each other their dearest secrets and vowing that undying

friendship which goes on from girlhood to old age—a vow which sometimes is fulfilled.

As for us older people, much of our time during those lovely June days was spent on the lawn in wicker chairs or hammocks, chatting, knitting or reading the time away, after the manner of idle summer folk with nothing to do but give themselves up to the enjoyment "of earth and air and running brook and flower."

Mr. Sinclair was an exception. Of him we saw little, for he was a lawyer, come by his physician's orders to this quiet retreat for a long summer's rest. Like an obedient patient he was already spending his days roaming about with gun on shoulder, or lying on his back in some shady place with his hat over his eyes. He was evidently a kindly disposed man, reserved even with his children, though always thoughtful for their welfare and affectionate, even indulgent, in his manner toward them. At times I saw a pleased smile at some of Madge's pretty, saucy ways, or a look of pride as he glanced at Philip's bright beauty. However, I never knew him to notice or even speak to Frank, except to add his reproof to that of his sister when the boy had been so unfortunate as to displease her.

From the first day Philip and Ralph had been inseparable companions. Ralph, having been upon the ground two weeks earlier, was able to act as guide in their adventures. They fished,

hunted for chipmunks and squirrels, made dams and bridges, sailed paper boats, built little stone huts and tumbled them down again, climbed trees, scrambled about on old fallen logs, ran and raced and screamed and hallooed from morning till night, as boys like to do in such places.

At first, as I have said, Ralph led the way in all their expeditions, but soon it was Philip who took command, and Ralph, abandoning all his former modes of amusing himself, eagerly and joyously followed the lead of his new comrade wherever the whims and fancies of the latter might take them.

Why this should have been I cannot tell; for Ralph was very bright himself and had thus far proved only too full of ingenious devices for whiling away his time, but he yielded to the influence of the beautiful boy, who was like a young king in his imperious ways and seemed to hold his sway over his new-found friend as he had done in a certain measure over his own people all his life.

There was one person who looked on this comradeship with approving eyes, and that was Mrs. Dale, who confided to me the anxieties she had experienced on account of her fiery-haired young boarder, during the two weeks preceding our arrival.

It appeared that from the day on which his mother, his two aunts, with himself and little

Johnny, had been set down at her door, there had been scarcely an hour when poor Mrs. Dale had not had him on her mind, except when she had known him to be safe in his bed.

He had never seen many colored people, and naturally his curiosity was much excited by them. He was especially interested in Aunt Mimy, the cook. She was an old fat "aunty," who was either laughing or scolding all the time. She wore a turban and large imitation gold earrings. She waddled about her kitchen sometimes barefoot and sometimes in old carpet slippers which shuffled loudly when she walked. Ralph became quite engrossed in his study of this old black woman and spent as much time in the kitchen or about the door-stone as she would permit.

However, after the first formalities had worn off, and he had become so familiar as to attempt certain little practical jokes, such as tying her fast to her chair by her apron-strings, hiding her spectacles, or perhaps putting a caterpillar down her back, Aunt Mimy would suddenly turn upon him in great wrath, and threatening him with a rolling-pin, ladle or whatever she might have at hand, would order him out of her domain at the top of her voice.

"Clar out'n my kitchen," she would shout. "Clar out'n my kitchen, you good-for-not'in' little redhead, an' don' you come neah dat do' no mo'.

Don' you let me cotch you cuttin' up dat-away no mo'. Out'n de way 'fo' I sen' de rollin'-pin flyin' out'n dat do' arter yuh. Clar out!"

Ralph would fly off as fast as his feet could carry him, shouting with delight, for it was great fun for him, and he knew Aunt Mimy's wrath was half assumed.

But there had come a day, just before our arrival, when the naughty boy had seriously offended her. She had borne with all his teasing and mischief-making in her usual merry, scolding way; she had even forgiven him when one morning he had poured some vinegar into a pot of steaming hot coffee just before she carried it to the breakfast-table; but when he had gone so far as to cut off the braided pigtails of her little granddaughter, who was the dearest object in the world to her, that was indeed beyond all forgiveness. After that cruel act, she never saw Master Ralph coming near the kitchen without screaming to him to "clar out!" And she kept a great iron spoon close at hand with which to warn him off, exactly as she "shooed" away the hens and chickens which came about the door.

I confess I was obliged to smile at the idea of the naughty boy swooping down upon the little black maiden and despoiling her of her precious woolly braids. Still, of course, it was very wrong in him, and it was no great wonder that it had

"Clar out'n my kitchen"

proved anything but a laughing matter to Aunt Mimy, whose heart was bound up in this child and her brother, a year or two older, for they had been left to her care by a daughter no longer living.

My attention had already been attracted to these children, partly because of their intelligent, shiny black faces and partly because of their singular names. Their mother, like most of her race, had admired high-sounding titles and had given them the romantic names of St. Clair and Cynthia. The latter had been called "Cynth," or "Cyn," but the boy had always gone by his full name of St. Clair, till some boarder, a year or two before, had conceived the happy idea of renaming them "Saint" and "Sinner." Since the boy was a gentle little fellow, who never thought of doing wrong or getting into mischief except where his harum-scarum sister, a little imp of naughtiness, led the way, everybody had at once recognized the fitness of these nicknames, and now the children were never called anything else except by their fond grandmother, who still clung to St. Clar and Cynth as she had always done.

But I am wandering too far from our young friend Ralph. When Mrs. Dale had finished the recital of his doings and misdoings, she said with a rueful look and yet with a smile too: "Now come with me, and I will show you Ralph's very

latest piece of mischief, which I discovered only this morning."

She led me across the lawn and past the house to a large stone almost square, but somewhat higher than it was broad, which served as part of the garden fence, and as somebody had long ago trained pretty vines about its top and sides, it was really quite an ornamental feature of that portion of the grounds, which was kept as daintily neat and attractive as were the more public parts of the lawn. Upon the broad, flat face of this stone which stood directly in front of the kitchen window where Aunt Mimy could not fail to see it a hundred times a day, was a rudely drawn but very comical picture of Aunt Mimy herself, with her great spoon raised above her head, her thick lips—represented thicker, even, than was natural—opened, as if giving forth a frightful yell, her feet in their enormous slippers unduly prominent as she appeared in the act of madly rushing after somebody of whom nothing could be seen but one foot and a slim leg disappearing round the corner of the stone. There had evidently been no room to portray more of this latter individual, for Aunt Mimy's figure was so large as to take up nearly the whole of the stone, except a small space occupied by a little pickaninny who was represented as crouching at her feet with a "pigtail" in either hand, two or three flying about in the air near

her and a sole remaining one in the place where it ought to be—on the top of her head. Tears of immense size were falling from this little damsel's eyes and the most horrified expression was on her face, as she gazed at a large pair of shears which had apparently just landed at her feet.

An old milking-stool from the barn had enabled the artist to reach high enough to do justice to Aunt Mimy's turban, and the remains of a pot of green paint stood beside it, while a small brush, hastily thrown down, revealed the instrument which had been used in creating this wonderful work of art.

It was a really funny picture, like a hideous, magnified comic valentine, and the worst of it was that it looked so much like Aunt Mimy and "Sinner" too, that it would have been impossible to mistake them. We did not dare to laugh, however, for Aunt Mimy sat at her kitchen window with her pipe in her mouth, gazing at it with outward calmness, but inwardly, I suspected, boiling with wrath at the young enemy who would probably have found it unwise to approach her just then. Luckily, he was at a safe distance, in some mountain retreat with his new friend Philip.

Mrs. Dale felt unhappy over her ruined stone. "The paint is quite dry," she said. "It must have been done some time when Aunt Mimy was

away in the village. We must try to remove it, though it will be a good deal of trouble. However, I hope that this is the last of Ralph's naughty capers; he has become so devoted to Philip, and Philip seems such a charming boy. Do you not find him so, Miss Agatha? His aunt assures me that he is as good as he looks, the soul of truth and honor, and the sweetest-tempered boy she has ever seen. She is sure he will have a good influence over Ralph."

It was true that Philip was a charming boy, with a frank look on his bright face and the sweetest smile in the world, and yet, why did a sudden remembrance come across my mind of that first morning when I had seen the frown on his brow and the pout on his lip, as he so emphatically insisted that he must sit on the front seat in the coach? At least it could not be said that he was wholly unselfish.

"He is certainly an attractive child," I said, "but I find myself more interested in his brother, the poor little lame boy."

"What! that boy?" exclaimed Mrs. Dale, in surprise. "What can you see in that strange, sullen-faced boy? I have never known such a singular child. I cannot understand how the two can be brothers, and twins at that. He seems so ill-natured and unhappy, shunning and shunned by every one, even his own people."

I acknowledged that there was something

strange about him. Still I thought there must be more good in him than she supposed. I remembered how only the day before I had witnessed a little scene which showed the boy in quite a new light, and strengthened my conviction that he could be kind, and even gentle and tender, when he liked.

I had been sitting in my room where I could see Philip and Ralph swinging each other in the old swing just opposite the window. Johnny had come up and begged them to swing him, too, but they, not wishing to be bothered with the little fellow, suddenly discovered that they did not care for that kind of sport any longer, so, carelessly telling Johnny to "go to mamma" they scampered off among the trees, leaving him alone, very indignant, and screaming at the top of his healthy young lungs.

They had been gone a minute or two, when whom should I see appear round the corner of the house but Frank. He glanced rather hesitatingly at Johnny and then all round the grounds, as if to see whether any one else was near. Finding the coast quite clear, he went up to the child and holding out his hand said something to him with a shy but pleasant smile. Presently I saw Johnny in the swing, and Frank swinging him as hard as he could, with a happier look on his face than I had ever seen there before, while Johnny fairly shouted with glee, his curls tossing

back and forth in the keen breeze, his eyes dancing and his cheeks glowing.

By and by, when he was tired of swinging, Frank lifted him carefully to the ground, and together the two walked to the old stump I have mentioned before. There Frank sat down and took his new little friend onto his lap.

They played quite merrily for a time, and Johnny's gleeful laugh rang out as he took Frank's glasses off and placed them on his own nose, while Frank looked for the moment like any other boy, careless and happy. Finally Johnny settled down quietly, and I guessed from the attentive way in which he looked up in his new friend's face that Frank was telling him some pleasing story. Suddenly, however, in the midst of it, Frank started, and hastily setting Johnny on the ground, limped away as fast as he could past my window, the old sullen look on his face, leaving Johnny looking after him in amazement. Then I saw that Mrs. Archer and Johnny's mother had just stepped off the porch and were coming toward the little fellow.

This little episode returned to my mind as I listened to Mrs. Dale, and while I wished to think that Philip was indeed as good and worthy as she believed him to be, yet I could not wholly agree with her in her estimate of his brother.

CHAPTER III

MISS AGATHA LEARNS MORE ABOUT THE SINCLAIR FAMILY

I WOULD not have it supposed that I did not share in the liking and admiration which every one about me felt for Philip Sinclair. From the very first I had been drawn toward the boy with his sunshiny face and quick, bright smile. He had a way of sitting down beside one and pouring out his whole eager little heart in the merriest chatter, looking up into one's face, meantime, with an unquestioning faith in an answering sympathy which was quite irresistible. When he confided to me some of the wonderful things he should certainly do when he became a man, or related certain strange and startling adventures which he had met with, even in the course of his short life, I enjoyed it all nearly as much as the little narrator himself.

Perhaps there was even a degree of vain pleasure in the thought that so young a boy should be willing to spend so many moments chatting in his light-hearted way with an old woman like me. Not that there was anything in that to boast of, for Philip was eager to make friends

with everybody about him. I think there was no one on the farm with whom he came in contact during those first days, whom he could not count among his friends. As for his own people, I have already spoken of his father's pride in his young son, of how his grave face brightened as he watched him at his eager play or listened to the merry jokes and stories with which Philip constantly enlivened us all.

It was evident, too, that the heart of his aunt was quite bound up in her nephew. She could scarcely have loved him more if she had been his mother. What puzzled me was the fact that all this wealth of affection should have been given to Philip alone. One would have supposed that, coming into the family as she had done in the early days of her widowhood, at the time when the children's mother had died, and they had been left to her charge, little twin brothers of three years of age, she would naturally have felt the same degree of love for both. But it was plain that for the lame brother she entertained a dislike amounting to aversion.

The fact that Madge seemed also to hold a place in her heart with Philip, though in a lesser degree, rendered the contrast of her bitter feeling for Frank all the more noticeable. Her affection for Madge appeared sincere, though manifested in a somewhat cold and dignified manner, and her niece returned it with that

warm-hearted, admiring love, mingled with a little awe, which a cold and stately woman often inspires in young girls' hearts. Madge looked upon her Aunt Margaret as embodying all the graces of mind and person. She admired her brilliant intellect, her distinguished form and handsome face, and frankly confided to me her intention of making herself as much like her as she could.

"Don't you think she is one of the most beautiful women you ever knew, Miss Agatha?" she asked of me, enthusiastically. "And isn't it just lovely to hear her talk?"

No doubt the lady was a gifted conversationalist and naturally took pleasure in exercising her talent. Perhaps, also, she might be called a beautiful woman, but her lips, though finely formed, were too tightly compressed at times, and there was often too steely a glitter in her light blue eyes to please me.

Privately, I rejoiced to think that though Madge might try as much as she liked to resemble her aunt, she never could succeed in doing so. She was a gay little rosebud of a maiden, with merry, impetuous, kind-hearted ways which I did not believe could ever be repressed into the cold haughtiness of the woman she looked up to with such girlish admiration.

But I was speaking of Mrs. Archer's love for Philip, which showed itself in all she said and

did. To her, he was the one perfect child in the world; she could see no flaw in him. I, too, admired him, as I have said, and looked with pleasure upon his sturdy form, rosy face, bright blue eyes and clustering curls, but all the time something sent a pang of pity through my heart for that other boy, for whom his aunt had no word of affection; for whom his father, even, had no look except one of cold disapproval; whom Madge, with all her genial ways and kindly feeling for the rest of us, treated with complete indifference. I could scarcely tell why I should have this tender thought in my mind for one who in an obstinate and sullen fashion had thus far repulsed all my little attempts to become better acquainted. But the feeling was there, and remained with me.

I was more than ever conscious of this feeling when, on a certain rainy evening, we were all assembled in the long parlor of which I have already spoken, about a little fire of hickory wood, entertaining each other as best we could, and the children were with us. Johnny's fond mother and aunties had been coaxing him to show off some of his accomplishments. He had sung a song or two, and had given us imitations of certain characters. Ralph Todd, who had a sweet little voice, sang two or three songs, and then Mrs. Archer said, with what was for her some enthusiasm:

"And now you must hear Philip recite."

"Oh, yes," said Madge, "Philip does recite so beautifully."

"Come, my dear," said Philip's aunt, "do n't be shy, love. Francis, listen! Philip is going to recite for us. Come, dear, let it be Paul Revere's Ride. Do n't be shy, dear."

Philip left his seat and came and stood before us, with a pleased smile. His fond aunt had no need to fear his shyness. I felt almost pained by that smile of Philip's. It seemed a flaw in our bright little diamond which I had not expected to find. However, I forgot it the next moment when he stood before us in a graceful position, having first made a low bow, and at once started with:

> "Listen, my children, and you shall hear
> Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere."

He recited it well, and it was evident that to his Aunt Margaret and Madge and to his father, who gazed upon him with a pride he could not conceal, there was something deeper than mere pleasure in the feeling with which they watched the brilliant boy who was the idol of their hearts.

Frank had changed his seat when his brother began to speak, and was now sitting on a stool in the corner next to me and very near to Philip. I saw him look up at Philip with a really happy expression on his face, an eager, proud look shin-

ing in his eyes, even through his glasses, as if his heart, too, were full of admiring love for the young orator. Once when Philip was in the middle of the long poem, he made a slight halt; his voice faltered just a moment. Suddenly, from the stool at my side came the missing word spoken low and distinctly, and Philip, with a look of relief, went triumphantly on, while Frank drew a long breath, as though he were glad that no failure had come. Once again came the momentary pause, and I saw Philip glance swiftly at his brother. Again the lost word came almost at the second it was needed, and Philip went on, hiding the sudden lapse so skilfully that probably no one but myself, sitting so near, could have told that there was a halt.

Philip sat down, receiving his reward in delighted praise from all his new friends and in loving words from his aunt and a kind pat on the head from his proud father. The boy looked as if he were quite as pleased as anybody. Indeed, I began to fear they were all spoiling him.

The children had now all exhibited themselves except Frank. Judging from the fact that he had been able to help Philip out of his little difficulties so successfully, I naturally supposed that here was one thing he could do probably as well as his brother. I longed to see the lonely boy stand up and take his share in the entertain-

ment, if only to give me the chance to say a word of praise to him who had so few kind words from anybody. So I said:

"And you, too, Frank, can recite, I believe. Let us hear you, my dear."

Frank glanced up at me with an astonished look, as if he thought I must be crazy to dream of such a thing, then hung his head, scowling and silent as usual. Philip's clear laugh rang out, as he said,

"O Miss Agatha, what an idea! Frank could n't recite anything any more than he could fly to the moon. He 'd break down before he 'd got through two lines."

Madge, as if for once she had noticed and felt sorry for the embarrassment poor Frank showed, with the red flush mounting to his forehead and his hands clenched in his shame and distress, said, with kindly intention, "Philip, don't laugh at poor Frank, just because he can't do what you can. He can't help it. People don't make themselves."

And then Mrs. Archer gave a loud sigh and a look of angry scorn at the suffering Frank, as she said: "No, they don't make themselves, but at least they may do what they can to improve themselves after they are made, and sit in an erect posture and assume a fitting expression when they are in the presence of ladies and gentlemen."

At this Frank started up and plunged headlong to the door, rushing off, I knew not where, but I feared he was not quick enough to escape the cruelest cut of all, to hear his father sadly say,

"Alas, poor Frank! I am afraid he will never do much for the name of Sinclair. He has my own name, too."

"Yes. If we could only have changed the names when we saw how different the two children were! But of course it was too late for that," sighed Mrs. Archer.

And all this took place before Madge and Philip and the rest of us! At the thought of that poor, neglected, wretched child, that wronged and cruelly treated boy, who but this moment had fled from the room to nurse his wrongs in sullen, bitter silence, I felt roused and angry. I could not remain there longer. If I could only find the child and do or say something to comfort him! But he was nowhere to be seen, and at last I retired to my room, and lay awake, trying to devise some means by which to help him and make him understand that I would be his friend.

The next day I resolved to try to learn more regarding the two brothers and, to that end, put some questions to Madge, as we sat together on the porch in the morning.

"Why do you all treat your brother Frank so strangely, my dear?" I asked. "You cannot

wonder that I notice the difference you make between Philip and him."

Madge looked a little thoughtful as she replied: "Yes, Miss Agatha, I suppose it does strike strangers so, though we never think anything about it. You see he has always been such a strange child. He has always seemed to want to be by himself, and he grows worse and worse as he gets older. You must see how he acts whenever you speak to him so kindly as you do, and he is just so with everybody. When any one comes to our house he hides out of sight if he can, and won't speak a word if he can help it. He behaves in such a way that sometimes I think people will believe he is actually foolish. I know it mortifies Aunt Margaret so she can hardly endure it. She does like fine-looking and well-appearing people; and you see how awkward and plain Frank is, by the side of Philip. It is very hard on us all to have Frank such a queer, ugly-looking boy," said Madge, with a sigh. "I am always ashamed when strangers see him, for fear they may think he is half-witted or something, though of course that is n't so."

"Of course not, my dear," I exclaimed, shocked that she should even think of such a harsh thing. "There is nothing of that kind the matter, as any one can see. Why should he not be as bright and attractive as Philip, if it were not for something that is all wrong—I do n't know what?"

"Like Philip? Oh, how could he, Miss Agatha? Why, just look at him! He 's lame to begin with, and his near-sightedness makes him so awkward. And it is n't only in looks. He never can do anything at school. Their teachers are always praising everything Philip does, and though they do n't tell us so, I know they think that Frank can't learn well. Mr. Morrison told father last month that Frank seemed to study as hard as any one, but when he came to his recitations he could do nothing at all."

"Has it always been this way?" I asked. "Was he so strange when he was a little child?"

"No, I do n't think he was quite so bad when he was little. I can recall, now that I think of it, that he was just as bright and merry as Philip when my mother was living, and I remember how he used to clamber up in her arms and laugh at me when I played wild animals with him and pretended to be coming to eat him." Madge smiled as she thought of this incident of their childhood. "He was lame from his birth and near-sighted, too, though of course we did n't notice it so much then. But because he was lame he was with mother more, and I remember one day when father told her she loved Frank best, she smiled and said, 'No, not more than Philip. They are equally dear, but Frank will need me more, and I have a different feeling for him.'

Then she kissed little Frank, and said he was more sensitive than Philip, and would need tender care; and I remember, too, that she sighed. I wonder," added Madge, with a little mistiness about her eyes, "if mother thought then that she would not live very long. I don't know why I should have thought of it all to-day; I never have before. It comes back to me as plainly as if it were yesterday, and I can see just how she looked, and how little Frank glanced up at her and put his arms round her neck, as if he knew all she was saying. He was a loving little fellow then, but he has grown up so different, and now all he wants is to keep away from everybody and have nothing to say to or do with us."

"Can the children remember their mother at all?"

"Oh, no! At least I do not think so, although Frank has always insisted that he remembers her, and how one day she held him in her arms and looked into his eyes and called him her darling. But I don't suppose he really does, for they were not quite three when she died, and Philip, who is so much brighter, does not remember her at all."

"And after your mother's death your aunt came to live with you?"

"Yes, Aunt Margaret came then, beautiful Aunt Margaret! And she has been kind to us, so that we have not missed our mother as we should

have done. Philip and I both love Aunt Margaret, and she loves us, but I think Frank hates her, Miss Agatha, and he mortifies and annoys her by the way he looks and acts, and does n't try to please her. It is no wonder that she cannot care much for him."

Here Mrs. Archer appeared on the porch, and learning the subject of our conversation, she, too, favored me with her views of her singular nephew. I was glad that Madge, seeing Gertrude Dale coming up the road with a basket on her arm, left us at this point, and ran down the steps to meet her, for I should not have liked her to hear her aunt's unkind remarks upon poor Frank's strange habits.

"Yes, it is true," she said, "that he is stupid, dull, obstinate, sullen, and to me almost unendurable. While he is not, of course, feeble-minded, he might as well be for all the good he will ever be to himself or any one else. It is his father's greatest trial that his own son, and his namesake at that, should be so inferior in every respect. If you have observed it, Miss Poppelheimer, he rarely looks at, or speaks to Frank. I think he tries to forget his existence as much as possible."

"But is that right?" I asked. "He is his own child. Can a father"——

She interrupted me. "Yes, he is his own child, but such a child! And his father has done

everything for him that he could. He has always had everything that Philip has had. Whatever gifts or pleasures have been given to Philip have been given to Frank also, when he would take them. Their clothes, their books, their playthings, all their surroundings, have always been the same, and yet you can see for yourself what it has all come to. You know what dear Philip is, lovely in form and feature, bright, intellectual, affectionate, good, everything to delight his father's heart and mine, and then—Frank!" Mrs. Archer drew her dainty knitted shawl about her shapely shoulders. "I have no words," she said with cold emphasis, " with which to express my feeling toward Frank."

"It is evidently not a feeling of love," I put in with a little warmth.

"No, you are right, Miss Poppelheimer. It is not one of love. To say nothing of his conduct toward myself, which is invariably marked by sullen obstinacy and hatred, how could I, who have always, I may say, found my chief pleasure in being surrounded by objects of beauty both in nature and art, and who cannot look without repulsion upon even the slightest mark of deformity, or even ugliness—how can I love any child who walks, who sits, who peers along, with his nose half a yard ahead of the rest of his body, who cannot without awkwardness answer the simplest question addressed to him, how can

I love such a child as that? Love!" she added disgustedly, "no, I can barely tolerate him in my sight.

"But it has always been so," she continued. "From the first moment when their father brought them to me after their mother's death, I chose Philip for my very own. He was so beautiful, and I worship beauty. And Frank was lame and plain, and even then had that peering look which is so offensive to me. Besides, he was exactly like his mother's father, a man I always hated," said Mrs. Archer, with a steely gleam in her eyes.

Her dislike was so intense that I wondered if, far back in the past, there had not been some malice or uncharitableness which had lingered all these years, and which she had, perhaps unconsciously, visited upon the unoffending little child who had been so early bereft of his dearest, and in his case, only friend.

"We cannot all be beautiful," I observed, in answer to what Mrs. Archer had said of Frank's looks. "We do not have the privilege of making ourselves. It seems a pity to have taken the one child to your heart and to have cast out the other for such a trifle as that."

I spoke somewhat warmly. In all that I had heard I felt my sympathies bound more closely still to the lame boy, and I had become convinced that more than half of the whole trouble

had arisen from the partiality shown by this injudicious aunt when the little twin brothers had been placed in her care.

But she was, as I have said, a woman who held one at arm's length. I, too, experienced a little of that awe which girls like Madge and Gertrude felt even while they admired her. Therefore I could not speak my mind so freely as I might otherwise have done.

But the little I had said enabled the proud lady to see that I did not wholly agree with her, and she did not like to have people differ from her. She said nothing for a moment or two, but sat eying me somewhat coldly. When she spoke it was not about Frank.

"It is true, as you say, Miss Poppelheimer, that we do not make ourselves, and we are not responsible for the features with which we come into the world, but at least it is our privilege and our duty to make ourselves look as well as we can. I have always striven myself, and have endeavored to have those strive with whom I have had any influence, to make the best of their own good points by their manner of dress and in every other way. I am sure if my means had been large, like your own, for instance, Miss Poppelheimer, it would have been my aim to clothe myself with taste and elegance, and certainly as much in accordance with the prevailing styles as possible. This should be my aim if only

for the sake of that fitness and beauty which to me are so important."

This was said with much dignity, and again I felt Mrs. Archer's cold, critical eyes scanning me from my scanty gray hair parted neatly in the middle and combed smoothly behind my ears, to the hem of my plain straight gown and the tips of my broad-soled shoes.

This was the way in which she chose to revenge herself for the mild doubt I had expressed of the wisdom of her treatment of her nephews.

I did not mind it in the least, however, for my old-fashioned dress and appearance were quite too common subjects of gentle ridicule among my own friends for me to care for any criticisms, silent or otherwise, which Mrs. Archer might make. For many years I had been in the habit of arraying myself as I pleased, and so long as I felt my dress to be comfortable, neat and appropriate, I went on my way with little thought of styles. Therefore, when Mrs. Archer's cold eyes looked me up and down with such lofty scorn, and she gave her little pin-prick, I did not feel it, and showed that I did not by agreeing with her heartily that it was our duty to make the most of our good points, not only in our outward appearance, but in mind and heart as well. If the proud lady suspected that I thought she might have cultivated the last mentioned organ more

than she had done, in regard to her nephew Frank at least, she was quite welcome to think so.

So we went into breakfast, outwardly on our usual terms of well-bred politeness, but inwardly I fear that I did not like Madge's "beautiful Aunt Margaret."

CHAPTER IV

FRANK'S MISADVENTURE WITH HIS PLATE, AND OTHER MATTERS

SEVERAL days passed after my conversation with Madge and Mrs. Archer in regard to Frank, and I found myself no nearer the fulfilment of my wish to know him better. He always sat by my side at meal times, but beyond a low "Good morning," in answer to my greeting, or a "Yes" or "No," when I attempted to draw him into conversation, there was no response to my well-meant efforts. But finally a better understanding was brought about between us, though not until after quite a series of incidents which I will now relate.

It happened one day at dinner that Mrs. Archer, in the course of one of her brilliant conversational efforts, suddenly observed Frank's plate, which was drawn too near the edge of the table. She spoke sharply to him to put it in its proper place and went on with what she was saying.

Frank obediently pushed back his plate and continued silently to eat his dinner.

Presently she called to him again, "Frank, do

you not see where your plate is? How can you be so stupidly careless? You will have it in your lap in another second."

By this time his father's attention had been roused, and he too spoke sternly to the boy. "Frank, obey your aunt, and be more careful."

Poor Frank looked confused and miserable, but again pushed back his plate, at the same time gazing at it in a puzzled way, as if he could not understand what had happened to it all at once.

All went well for a little while, and then I chanced to glance in Frank's direction, and discovered that the singular plate had again started on its travels, and was once more in the greatest peril. While Frank was drinking from his glass, I deftly moved it back, and he went on eating, none the wiser. I could not imagine what had led the dish to caper about in this strange manner. Frank seemed to be eating as quietly as usual, and no such trouble had arisen before. However, I congratulated myself that for once I had saved the poor child from the sharp eyes and sharper tongue of his aunt, and composed myself to listen to the conversation.

In less than three minutes, however, Mrs. Archer's warning came again, "Frank, see what you are doing!"

But she was too late. Over the plate went into Frank's lap, and then, as he started back

amazed, rolled off with its freight of meat, gravy, jelly and vegetables all down the side of my skirt, leaving it a sight to behold.

"Francis, leave the table!" exclaimed Mr. Sinclair, in sharp, stern accents. He had risen, and stood looking at Frank with a deep frown and a flush of mortification on his face. "To think a son of mine could show himself such an awkward lout as that!" he said.

Poor Frank seemed almost dazed for a moment as he gazed down at the offending plate; then as he caught the meaning of his father's harsh words he gave one appealing look into his face, and with a strange sound, half sob, half groan, pushed back his chair and rushed from the room.

For a moment no one spoke. My own heart and all my thoughts had gone with the little outcast who had just fled from my side. I knew he had not meant to cause me trouble. And even if he had been careless, as any child might be, it seemed a cruel thing that his sad little heart must have this new burden laid upon it, this harsh reproof and stern dismissal from a cold, unloving father.

I sat looking down at my ruined skirt, but I was not thinking of it at all.

"O Miss Agatha," cried Madge on my other side, "your dress is quite spoiled! How could he do such a thing!"

Here every one began to talk of the soiled

gown and the lamentable carelessness of Frank, and Henry, the waiter boy, rushed about removing the débris and righting matters as well as he could. Meanwhile I assured them that I did not mind the injury to the gown in the least, but I could not bear to think that poor Frank must be sent away in disgrace on my account.

"It was simply an accident," I said; "he never meant to do it."

Mrs. Archer eyed me coldly when I thus took the child's part, and said that in her opinion his punishment was all too light, that he grew more awkward every day and needed a sharp reminder now and then to bring him to a sense of his careless habits. Then in her icy way, though with no apparent impoliteness, she gave me to understand that she considered her brother abundantly able to judge of the amount of discipline necessary in regard to his own children.

I felt duly rebuked and said no more. Mr. Sinclair likewise said nothing, but he looked uncomfortable, as did every one else, except the boy, Ralph, who was now my next neighbor, and who kept up a suppressed tittering all through dinner. I supposed the adventures of Frank's plate had been pure fun for him, though they had proved anything but mirthful to Frank himself.

As soon as I could escape from the table, I put on my garden hat and quietly started in search

of Frank. I had no idea where he might be, but felt that I must find him and do something to comfort him in this new trouble.

I walked all about the house and outbuildings, and to all the nooks and shady places on the lawn, to the old stump where he liked to sit, to the swing and the hammocks, but he was nowhere to be seen. Still I would not be discouraged, and sauntered up the first mountain path I came to, hoping I might have the good luck to find him somewhere.

And so I did. He, too, had probably, when he left the table in that wild rush of grief and dismay, taken the first path he came to, without any thought or care where it might lead him. So in a little while I came upon him where he lay at the foot of a chestnut-tree. He was stretched at full length on the greensward, his face hidden in one arm while the other tightly clasped his little dog which crouched by his side. He was still sobbing, and did not hear me as I softly approached. Even when I stepped close to him he did not notice until I stooped and put my hand on his head, saying, "Frank, look up, my dear." Then he started and sprang to his feet. And the look in his face was that of some wild, hunted animal brought to bay.

"Go 'way!" he shouted. The tears were streaming down his cheeks, but his hands were clenched, and he looked at me in a passion of rage

and misery. "Go 'way!" he shouted again. "I won't have you here. Go 'way, I tell you."

"But, Frank," I said, "let me come. Let me speak to you. I want to help"——

"I don't want your help. I don't want anybody's help. I want to be all by myself."

"But, Frank"—— I began again.

"No! no! I won't listen to you," he cried, putting his hands to his ears. "I tell you, I hate you. I hate everybody in this world. So there! Come, Laddie!" And with that he snatched up his dog and limped away faster than I should have thought possible, leaving me standing alone, disappointed, sore and angry to think that all my well-laid plans had thus fallen to the ground.

What a passion the child was in! What a wicked temper he must have! After all, his own people had been right when they one and all declared that nothing could be done with him. Yet what a pity it was! I had meant so well, and wished to be his friend.

As I walked slowly back to my room, I acknowledged to myself that there was nothing more to do. I had quite failed, and would leave him to himself hereafter. Then, all at once, I remembered how, even in his passion, he had clasped his little dog tenderly in his arms; and I thought once more, "There is certainly some good in him. In spite of all I have seen, he

must have a good heart." But I could not tell how to reach it.

That evening when we assembled for supper Frank was not among our number, and after we had been seated for some minutes he still did not appear. His father observed his absence and inquired of the other children if they knew where he was. But neither they nor any one else could tell anything about him. No one except myself had seen or thought of him since his hasty rush from the dinner-table.

Then I told them how I had seen him during my afternoon walk, though without mentioning the circumstances of our meeting, and suggested that he might possibly still be in the same woods.

So a servant was sent to look for him. Presently the man returned and announced that he had found him, but that Frank said he did not want any supper, and refused to come with him.

Then Mr. Sinclair said, "Go to him again and tell him if he does not come at once I shall come after him myself."

We went on eating rather silently until, as we had nearly finished our supper, Frank appeared at the door. His face showed evidence of his long weeping, though there were no tears now in his eyes. He held his head down, and wore his deepest frown and most sullen aspect. Still, as he came up to my side and drew out his chair to

seat himself as usual, I saw him throw a quick, appealing look at his father.

It cast out all my own irritated feeling toward the poor boy. I could no longer feel angry when I noted that swift glance, as swiftly withdrawn. Love and longing and childish despair were in his sad eyes as he raised them for that brief moment, and I felt my heart touched anew and longed more than ever before to be able in some way to comfort and help him.

As he laid his hand on his chair, his father spoke quickly. "Not there, Frank. You must not sit beside Miss Poppelheimer any longer," he said. "Come here by me," making room between himself and Philip. "I cannot have you ruining any more gowns, as you"——

But I interrupted him. "O Mr. Sinclair," I cried, "do not change his seat. I like Frank. There is no one here whom I should be so pleased to have beside me. What difference does it make about the gown? I would rather a dozen gowns should be ruined than that Frank should be blamed for what I am sure was not his fault. Kindly say no more about it, and let him keep his seat by me. I shall not feel pleased if any change is made."

I cannot tell why I spoke so warmly, for I was always somewhat diffident with Mr. Sinclair and stood a little in awe of him as well as of his haughty sister. I felt my face flush, and perhaps

my old hand trembled a little in my nervousness as I patted Frank's shoulder and said, "He may sit down, may he not?"

"Certainly, if you really wish it, Miss Poppelheimer," said Mr. Sinclair, politely, but looking somewhat surprised. "It is kind of you to take such a lenient view of the matter, and I hope Frank will feel grateful to you, and be more careful in the future."

So that little episode closed, though I felt Mrs. Archer's cold gaze upon me several times, and caught a surprised glance or two from the rest of our party, who were no doubt wondering why I should suddenly have become thus interested in "that sullen little lame boy."

There was another pair of eyes whose startled gaze met mine during that eventful meal. Two or three times when I glanced at Frank I found him looking up at me with a strange, wistful expression on his face which I had never seen there before. Almost I fancied there was gratitude in the dark eyes raised to mine, but they were so quickly withdrawn perhaps I was mistaken. He ate in silence, as usual, and I would not disturb it to trouble him or to call attention to him.

After this affair matters at table went smoothly with us all for several days. The dishes behaved well and so did the children, with the exception of Johnny, who never by any possible chance behaved well at the table. There came a day,

however, when another great sensation occurred, for which poor Frank could not be blamed and with which he had nothing to do.

It happened that at dinner Master Johnny was unusually troublesome and hard to please. The mother and aunties were doing their best to quell the disturbance so that we might listen to Mrs. Archer, who had started upon one of her favorite themes and was now instructing all of us in general and the two girls in particular, on "How to make ourselves beautiful." Everybody was trying to hear above Johnny's clamor, and Mrs. Dale, hoping to quiet him, sent Henry softly out for a saucer of the pudding we were all to share at a later stage of the dinner. This she presented to Johnny, who was graciously pleased to accept it, and we all drew a long breath and composed ourselves to listen once more.

But soon our young tyrant's voice rose again, shrill and clear above Mrs. Archer's dulcet tones. He had thought at last of what he wanted. "Det pie for Donny! Some b'ueberry pie for Donny," he roared. Louder and louder came the demand, poor little Mrs. Todd and the aunties striving in vain to quiet him.

Mrs. Archer was obliged to suspend her remarks for the time being until Mrs. Dale, who remembered that there was luckily some left from yesterday's dinner, had a tempting

piece of juicy blueberry pie brought and placed before Johnny. He received it with pleased smiles and merry little bobs of his head, looking indeed like an angel, though he had not by any means behaved like one.

And now once more Mrs. Archer gathered up the scattered threads of her discourse and went on telling the girls how they should cultivate their good points. They listened with rapt attention, with far more reverence than I had shown, when, a short time before, she had given me the same advice.

"Yes," she said, "we can do it. Even if Nature has denied us the boon, we can, in great measure, make ourselves beautiful"——

But here Johnny, who had suddenly discovered that his pie was no more satisfactory than the rest of his dinner, burst out into one of his yells. "It is nasty, bad pie," he cried, "an' Donny won't have it!" And with that he snatched it up and flung it, plate and all, with all his strength across the table.

The plate fell against the glass pitcher, and both were shattered into a thousand pieces, but the blueberry pie, alas, landed squarely in Mrs. Archer's face, just as she was, in her stately fashion, declaring that we must make ourselves beautiful.

It landed there not as pie but as a sort of conglomeration of berries, crust and juice, which

spread out in all directions and trickled down the lady's distinguished nose in a manner appalling to contemplate.

Could anything be more dreadful? A horrified silence reigned for a moment. Then Johnny's mamma picked up her screaming son and fled with him swiftly from the scene. Aunt Lizzie and Aunt Jessie followed, with only one thought —how to get most quickly from the room and help their sister to administer such correction as they dared to their terrible young charge.

Silence reigned, as I have said, but only for a moment. Mrs. Archer sat the image of petrified amazement. No one spoke or moved till there came a great, hearty "Ha! ha! ha!" from Mr. Sinclair, the first real laugh I had ever heard him give.

"Margaret, you at least will not need to make yourself beautiful to-day," he said. "Johnny has effectually performed that service for you."

And then we all allowed ourselves to give vent to our feelings. I can never forget Mrs. Archer's face, as she rose majestically and said, as she prepared to leave the room, "This is too much. Either that child retires from the table in the future, or I do."

She walked to the door like a tragedy queen, but her face was not suited to the part. It was so daubed with the mass of Johnny's pie that

one could scarcely have told that she had any features.

After this exciting little affair we all settled down to eating our dinners once more, and were nearly through the first course when I saw that that unlucky plate of Frank's had once more started upon its travels and was at that moment tottering on the brink of the table. I pushed it back as quickly as I could, and Frank, who was just setting down his glass, went on eating in all unconsciousness of the timely rescue. I could not think that any awkward movement of his had brought the dish into danger, for he had been eating quietly and like a gentleman, as he always did.

To be sure he had laughed with the rest of us at the sight of his aunt's face, but I am certain that no one could blame him for that. It had done my heart good to hear him, and to know that he actually could laugh aloud like other boys. That, however, would not have caused him to be careless about his plate, and I was almost convinced that he had had nothing to do with putting it in its dangerous position. I therefore resolved to keep one corner of my eye steadfastly on that plate until I should be able to solve the mystery, and in less than three minutes I found out all about it.

The next time Frank happened to turn his head away, I saw a small brown hand reach over from

his opposite side and give the plate a little jerk.

Of course it was Ralph Todd who had done it every time, and who had brought all that trouble upon poor Frank. I might have guessed it at the very start, but somehow I had never thought of him and his wretched jokes.

I called out suddenly, and impulsively, "O Ralph, it is you who have done this mischief"——

But before the first word was well out of my mouth, he had seen that he was discovered, and with a face red with suppressed merriment and a hasty "Please 'scuse me" to Mrs. Dale, he, too, fled wildly from the table, to the amazement of the few who were left.

"What now?" exclaimed Mr. Sinclair. "What 's the matter with everybody to-day?"

Then I explained as quickly as I could how I had caught that incorrigible boy in a fresh piece of naughtiness, and told them how I had felt almost sure for some time that Frank had had nothing to do with it. It had been a small matter to me, I said, but to Frank it was a serious trouble, and I was glad that the blame could now be put where it belonged.

"The young rascal!" exclaimed Mr. Sinclair. "He ought to be whipped and put to bed."

"But you see Frank had nothing to do with it," I reminded him.

"Eh? Oh, no. Certainly not. Well, I am glad

to hear it. You must look out for him after this, Frank. Do n't let him play any more of his jokes on you," he said carelessly. Then he began talking to John Dale about something else, and seemed to forget all about it.

I felt deeply disappointed. He had not been unkind, only careless in his manner. But I thought I could not have passed the matter by with such indifference had I been in his place. I even felt that, man as he was, he owed an apology to the young boy for all the pain and mortification he had made him suffer.

I thought so more than ever, when, as we rose from the table and dispersed to our usual occupations, he passed out of the room with his arm round Philip's shoulders. He was listening with a pleased smile to the merry chatter of the one son, but evidently had no thought for the other. I saw Frank send a longing glance after the two, and then with a short, quick breath, which sounded almost like a sob, he too passed out by another door, and went his lonely way.

It happened that next morning Gertrude and Madge came in to breakfast fresh from an early ramble, laden with flowers, as usual, and among the number was one pretty blue flower which I had never seen before. Being somewhat given to botanizing, I wished to procure some specimens of this plant to examine and preserve. The girls had found only this single blossom near the

path where they were walking, but Madge was sure she had seen some more a little way down the steep hillside, where it would have been hard for them to climb.

"We should tear our skirts all to pieces down there," she said, "but the boys could get down easily enough. Philip, you will get some for Miss Agatha, won't you?"

But it appeared that Philip and Ralph both thought that it would be impossible for them to clamber about among the brush and brambles, and besides they had important matters on hand and were quite too busy to think of getting flowers for anybody that morning. So, seeing that they did not wish to go, I begged the girls to say no more about it, hoping that I might find some for myself later on.

After breakfast I sat by myself on the porch reading till some one called me, when I went into the house leaving my open book behind me in my chair.

When I came back an hour later what was my surprise to see a handful of the lovely flowers I had been wishing for lying across my book. They were evidently just gathered and had been carefully placed between the leaves in such a manner that they could neither be crushed nor blown away. There was no one at hand to ask how they had come there. All the young people had scattered to their favorite haunts and the

elders were in their own rooms. So I had to wait until dinner-time before I could make any inquiries.

But when we were all at table, and I displayed my pretty flowers, no one could tell me where they came from, and it seemed likely to remain a mystery till Gertrude suggested that probably her brother John had brought them. He had been at table in the morning and knew that I wished for some. He was not there now, however, having been called away just before dinner. Doubtless that was the explanation, we all thought, and I had it in mind to thank him as prettily as I could the next time I should see him.

Just as we had settled the matter in this way, I heard the boy at my side draw a quick breath as of relief or satisfaction, and glancing round I saw Frank's face, red and embarrassed. In a second it flashed upon me that it was he, and not John Dale, who had brought the flowers and laid them so carefully in my book. I was as sure of it as if I had seen him place them there. Though how he, who was so crippled, could climb among the rocks where the others thought they could not go, I could not tell. I would not say a word, however, nor disturb him by another look, but I was glad that he had done this kind and graceful act, for it looked at last as if the poor child's heart had softened toward me.

Whom should I see but Master Frank

I said nothing to any one else of my discovery, but looked all about for Frank that afternoon. He was nowhere to be seen, and I could not tell how I was to find an opportunity to thank him. The day passed by. I saw him at the supper-table where I could say nothing, and after supper he disappeared as usual.

The next morning when I rose, the matter had escaped my mind for the time being, till, as I raised my window-shade, who should I see trudging down the mountain path but Master Frank with both hands full of the pretty blue blossoms. He had evidently found a new spot where they grew abundantly, and he looked cheerful, as he limped along the path with his little dog leaping and dancing by his side as if he knew and shared his young master's pleasure. I resolved that I would still say nothing, but wait and see what would happen next.

At breakfast he did not speak to me, except for the low "Good morning." After breakfast, I decided to lay a little trap for him, and see if I could not by means of the flowers manage to break down the wall of diffidence, misunderstanding, or whatever it was, which still held us apart.

I went out on the porch again with my book. But about ten o'clock I slipped into the parlor, which was empty, and sat down where I could peep through the curtains. Presently I saw Frank, with the flowers in his hand, come to the

foot of the steps from the direction of the old stump where he sat so much. He looked all about him to see if any one was near, and then came quickly up the steps and deposited his flowers on my book.

And there I caught him. Coming softly out, I put my arm round him just as he was turning to go away, and said,

"Ah, I have found you out, my dear! I have found you out at last! I know now who it was that brought me those lovely flowers yesterday."

CHAPTER V

MISS AGATHA MAKES FRIENDS WITH FRANK AND SCOLDS RALPH

FRANK turned about quickly within my arm, looking startled, dismayed, almost frightened. "Let me go, please. I have to go now," he said, low and hurriedly.

But I would not release him just then. "No, no!" I cried. "Stay with me a moment, my dear, and let me speak to you." And then as I held him close and looked into his face, which showed shyness, embarrassment, but no resentment, I said: "You are not angry with me now, Frank, as you were the other day. What made you so angry then?"

Frank moved about uneasily and looked down at the toe of his boot, but said nothing. Still he did not try to get away, and I took that for a good sign and went on,

"I am sure you do not hate me now or you would never have brought me the flowers. Do you think you do, my dear?"

He suddenly lifted his head and glanced into my eyes, then as quickly turned away. "I was bad that day," he said in a muffled voice.

"But now you have thought better of it, and you are no longer angry?"

"No, no! how could I be, when you have been so good to me?"

"Oh, my dear, I want to be good to you if you will only let me," I cried. "Come, let us sit down here," drawing him with me to the end of the porch, and seating myself on the long bench which ran along its side. "Let us sit down and talk things over. I like you so much, Frank, and I have taken what you may think a very queer notion into my head. It is that you and I should become real friends. What do you say to that? All the others have their own particular mates. Madge and Gertrude go together, and Philip and Ralph. Your father has your Aunt Margaret, and Johnny's mamma has her sisters, but there is no one for me. I am lonely sometimes when I have to take my strolls by myself and I should like it very much if you would come with me now and then. What do you say, my dear? It is true that I am old and you are young, but for all that I think we might be good comrades, and it would be a real kindness if you would help to cheer my lonely hours occasionally. What do you say, Frank? Will you be my little friend?"

Frank had been looking at me with earnestness all through my long speech, but when I paused after putting my question he hesitated a

moment and then as though he did not quite understand said, "But—I am Frank."

"Of course you are, my dear. Did you think I believed you to be anybody else?"

"But you would not want me. Nobody ever wants me."

"But I do, Frank. I want you for my own little friend, and I will love you very dearly if you will let me."

"But I do not know how, Miss Ag" —— He hesitated at my name.

"Miss Agatha, of course. Why should you not call me by that just as Madge and Philip do?"

"I should not know how, Miss Agatha," he repeated timidly. "I never had any friend, and I don't know how people do. And you would n't like me. You could n't, for nobody ever does, I am so stupid and bad. And then I 'm lame. How could you like to walk with me?"

He spoke sadly and a little longingly, I fancied, as if he might have liked a friend, even if it were only an old one like me.

"I wish I could," he said, and then added shyly, "but anyhow I shall love you just the same, 'cause you 've been so good to me."

Poor, neglected child! The tears started to my eyes, but I would not let them fall. "My dear, never say such things to me," I said briskly. "You are not stupid, and you are not bad. And

as for being lame, you are just the one for me, for I am old and cannot get about over the mountains very quickly either, so who could suit me so well as you? Besides, as I just told you, I am often lonely, Frank, and your companionship would be very pleasant if you would give it to me now and then. Sometimes I have thought that you know as well as I what it is to be lonely, my little lad. Is it not so?"

Frank gave a quick sigh, but said nothing at first. In a moment, however, he spoke, glancing down at the little dog at his feet, which sat looking up into his young master's face affectionately, "But I have Laddie."

"True, so you have, my dear. But I have not even a 'Laddie' to go about with me. I am glad, though, that you are not quite alone. How much he loves you, Frank! See him look at you."

Laddie suddenly jumped up on the bench, and placing his forepaws on Frank's shoulders, began to bark with quick little yelps, and kissed his face so energetically that Frank could not help laughing.

"He heard you say that, Miss Agatha," he said, with a bright look up at me.

"Do you think he understands what we say?"

"I know he does."

"Then, Laddie," said I, turning to the dog and patting his head, "ask your master if he will not

do as I wish and promise to be my good little friend, and go out with me this afternoon for a long stroll and show me where the lovely flowers grow. Ask him, Laddie."

Laddie looked up into Frank's face, and seeing a pleased if somewhat confused expression there, was so delighted that he began to bark again and kissed the boy's cheek more vigorously than before. So then I pretended that Laddie had joined his appeal to my own, and that now I could not consent to any refusal. I made Frank promise that he would be on his old stump waiting for me at two o'clock, and would take me a little way up the mountain which we called "Old Bald Top" to show me where the flowers grew.

Just after this matter was satisfactorily arranged, we heard some one come whistling through the hall, and seeing that Frank grew uneasy I let him go. But as he turned to walk down the steps he glanced around at me, and there was a grateful look in his eyes. A wistful, half-doubting look it was, too, as if he wished to assure himself that it was really true that some one liked him in spite of all his faults and infirmities. I answered the look with as hearty and cheery a smile as I could summon to my face on such short notice, but perhaps my lips trembled a little, and I am sure there was a tear in my eye. For was it not a cruel thing that this child, at eleven years of age, should have it to say that he

had never yet known what it was to have a friend?

The person who had been whistling in the hall proved to be no one else but Ralph Todd. He came to the open door and stood there carelessly looking about for a moment, before he spied me sitting in the corner on the bench. Now I had seen nothing of Ralph since the day before, when he had so suddenly fled from the dinner-table after my discovery of his mischievous attack upon Frank's plate. I was glad to see him now, as I wished to have a few moments' talk with him in regard to that affair. He, on his part, did not appear to share this desire of mine, and at first looked as if he hardly knew whether to run away or stay. But Ralph and I were well acquainted by this time, and on very friendly terms, so friendly, in fact, that I had already upon several occasions taken him to task in a kindly way for various naughty pranks of his. So now, when I called to him, "Come here, Ralph, I want to talk to you," he at once gave up all thought of flight, and came to the bench. Throwing down his hat carelessly he flung himself upon the seat close by my side and looked up at me with a roguish twinkle in his eyes.

"Now don't scold me, Miss Agatha," he said, laughing.

"But I must, my dear," I said. "That is exactly what I called you out here for."

"It 's all about that plate, I suppose," he said ruefully.

"Yes, it is. Ralph, I do not see how you could be so cruel as to play one of your silly jokes on that poor boy, of all people."

"Why not?" asked Ralph. "Why should I mind him any more than any one else?"

"Because he is lame and lonely and sad and so unfortunate in many ways. I should think your heart would be touched by the sight of his unhappiness, and that you would long to help him, instead of trying to bring more trouble on him."

"But I did n't try to bring trouble on him," said Ralph, a little uneasily. "I just moved his plate round a little."

"Yes, and you saw what came of it—how the poor child had to leave the table in disgrace, and how he suffered for it."

"Suffered!" repeated Ralph. "Why I do n't suppose he suffered any. Why should he? What 's being sent away from the table? My father 's sent me away a hundred times, and I 'm sure I never suffered any. And as for Frank Sinclair, he would n't mind it as much as I would. I do n't suppose he 'd mind a thing like that any more than that cow out there would."

"Why should you think that, my young friend?"

"Why, you know, do n't you, Miss Agatha?

He is n't bright like other people, exactly," said Ralph, looking up at me as if in surprise at my lack of understanding.

"O Ralph, what a false, what a cruelly false idea you have of that poor, wronged child!" I cried. "How can you misjudge him so? What you say is not true. He is as bright as any one, if only he were not so neglected and ill-treated by even his"——

But then I stopped. It would never do to utter all my thoughts to a boy like Ralph.

"What makes you think so, Ralph?" I asked. "Is it because you have never heard him say anything? Do you think he cannot speak the English language fully as well, perhaps even better than you do?" I spoke rather pointedly, for Ralph was not particularly careful in his speech, and was in the habit of receiving frequent corrections from his own people in regard to his grammatical failings.

However, my little sarcasm was quite lost on him, and he replied very placidly: "Oh, no, I know he can talk well enough, for I've heard him two or three times when I've gone to Philip's room before breakfast. You know they sleep together. Once I heard Frank talking so fast I thought it was Philip, for it sounded just like Phil's voice, and when I opened the door and found it was Frank, I tell you I did n't know what to make of it. He was talking and laugh-

ing and had his arm round Phil and looked so happy I would n't have known him if I 'd seen him anywhere else. Philip was laughing at what Frank was saying, and they were having a jolly good time together. Now was n't that queer, Miss Agatha? But the minute Frank saw me, he turned his back as quick as a shot, went into the corner to put on his coat, and hurried out of the room as fast as he could."

"It certainly was a little singular," said I, feeling puzzled, for I had seldom seen the two brothers together. "I am glad to hear it," I added, "for I have thought it strange they did not seem to care more for each other. We always think that twins have a greater love for each other than other brothers and sisters."

"Well," said Ralph, "I do believe that Frank must like Philip, anyhow, even if he does hate everybody else, for he was looking at him just as if he loved him, and he had his arm round Phil's neck when I opened the door."

"Well, then, how can you think he is so dull? You have heard that he can talk and have seen that he knows at least enough to make his brother laugh at what he was saying."

"But, he can't say 'boo! to a goose' anywhere else, Miss Agatha. And they all seem to think he 's no good. None of 'em takes any notice of him, and they do n't act as if they thought he knew anything. I should think his

own folks ought to know. Just look at Phil, how different he is; knows such a lot of things. I wish I knew half as much as he does. And Frank can't do any of 'em—recite poetry and talk to grown-up folks and all that. Of course he would if he could."

"Perhaps he might if he had a chance," I said a little dryly. "Everybody is so busy admiring Philip's attainments they have no time to see whether Frank can do anything or not."

However, I realized that it was not well to continue in this strain. I informed him, instead, as kindly as I could, that I was sure that he and even Frank's own people were quite mistaken in their judgment of him. I told him how I had discovered that the boy had really a kind heart under that repellent manner of his, how I thought that if Ralph himself would only make a few advances, and endeavor to become better acquainted with the lonely boy, he might do much to make his summer a happier one, and would at least have the consciousness that he had done a good deed by trying to help him along a pathway which was likely to prove only too stony at best.

But Ralph was young and careless, and though we talked some time, he did not seem particularly impressed by anything I said.

"I dare say he would only scowl and glare at me if I did try to speak to him," he said. "And he would n't want to play anything I 'd want to.

Philip says he never wants to do anything but read and talk to that dog. No, Phil 's worth a dozen of him. I think I 'll go now and hunt up Phil, Miss Agatha."

"At least promise me before you go that you will play no more of your stupid tricks on Frank," said I, somewhat warmly.

"Oh, yes, I 'll promise that, Miss Agatha. I did n't mean any harm at first. The plate really was 'most off the table the first time his aunt spoke to him, and then it came into my head to try to knock it off. I thought it would be such fun to see it go over." And the naughty boy laughed.

"I do not at all thank you for my own part in the joke, either," said I, tartly. "I do not care to have my clothing ruined in any such manner."

"That was too bad," said Ralph rather dubiously. "But I 'll tell you one thing," he added, brightening up, "I 'm jolly glad it was your dress I spoiled."

"And why, my kind young friend, should you be glad of that?" I inquired, astonished at this announcement.

"Oh, because it would n't make so much difference to you. Gertrude Dale says you can get a new dress every day in the year if you want to. If it had been mamma's dress now, that would be a different thing," said Ralph, shaking his head seriously.

I hardly knew whether to be angry or to laugh

at this singular cause for congratulation on Ralph's part. Nevertheless, I hastened to assure him that I had no present intention of replenishing my wardrobe to such a remarkable extent, and that I would thank him to be as careful of my gowns in future as of his mother's.

"All right, Miss Agatha, I 'll remember," said Ralph quite humbly.

"And, Ralph, how you can go on from day to day deliberately trying to hurt people and seeing something funny in it, I do not understand. How would you like it if some one should set to work to hurt your feelings the way you have hurt poor old Aunt Mimy's by that picture, and now Frank's, too?"

Ralph gave a little shrug and grinned.

"They could n't do it, Miss Agatha. Do n't you see they could n't? Because I have n't got any feelings to hurt."

"Perhaps you think so."

"I know so," said Ralph with conviction. "I never had any. All the feeling I know anything about is when I fall out of a tree, or stub my toe, or when father gets out his strap. Of course I can feel that."

I said nothing. Where was the use of appealing to such a young harum-scarum? Only this was to be said, that he was not half so bad at heart as he pretended, and I hoped he would think differently some time.

"Ralph," said I, after we had sat in silence a moment, "what does make you and Johnny so naughty?"

"I don't know, Miss Agatha," said Ralph.

"Sometimes I think you are the very naughtiest children I ever knew."

"I'm afraid so, Miss Agatha." And Ralph shook his head as if in despair, though there was a provoking twinkle in his eye.

"Your mother is such a sweet little woman," I went on; "so kind to everybody."

"Isn't she, though?" said Ralph enthusiastically. "The jolliest little mother! And father's good, too, and as grave as a judge."

"Your aunties are dear little women, too, both of them."

"Aunt Lizzie'll stand an hour and brush at a fly to send it out of the door, instead of letting me come this"—— and Ralph thrust out his hand, opening and shutting it quickly, as he drew it swiftly past his nose, to show how the fly would be dealt with if he had his way. "I don't know, Miss Agatha, what makes us so bad," he added reflectively. "I suppose we can't help it."

"I wish you would try to help it, all the same, Ralph," I said, very seriously. "I should like to see you grow into a good, earnest youth, merry and playful as you like, but kindly and helpful to every one around you, instead of doing such things

as that," and I pointed with some scorn to where we could get a glimpse of one corner of the stone which still displayed Aunt Mimy's portrait.

"Well, I'll try," said Ralph, looking more in earnest than he had done hitherto. "I'll see what I can do. Anyhow, I won't bother Frank after this. And I'll tell you what, Miss Agatha, I'll promise something else, too. If I can see any way to help him along, I will. That is, if he'll let me, but I don't suppose he will."

"That is right, my dear. I like to hear you talk that way, and I know you are not half so bad as you would like me to believe. One thing more, Ralph," for I saw he was impatient to go. "Do not be too certain about your having no feelings like other people. I am sure you have them somewhere hidden away, and you would n't like to have them hurt any more than the rest of us do. Think of that the next time you are tempted to play a joke on somebody."

But Ralph's serious mood was quite gone, and he only laughed, and picking up his hat from the floor, tossed it onto his head.

"Good-bye, Miss Agatha," he shouted. "I'm off now."

"Where do you go?"

"Off to find Phil, and then I guess we'll go hunting up in the woods."

"What shall you hunt for to-day?"

"Oh, anything that comes along. Perhaps I

had better hunt for my feelings up there," he added, with a twinkle in his eyes. "That's what I'll do, Miss Agatha; I'll go up there and hunt for my feelings. Would n't you?"

With that he was off. There was a laugh and a hasty rush down the steps, and the next moment I saw him flying across the lawn, shouting and waving his hat to a small figure far up the road to the hotel, which I supposed must be that of his boon companion, Philip Sinclair.

Well, he was young yet and naturally the merriest of rogues. One must not be too severe upon him, I thought. No doubt he would come out all one could wish him to be in the end. At all events he had seemed touched, for the moment at least, in regard to poor Frank, and I hoped he would not forget his promise to help him if the chance should come his way.

CHAPTER VI

FRANK AND MISS AGATHA TAKE THEIR FIRST WALK TOGETHER

We were quite a small party assembled at dinner that day. Johnny no longer came to our table. Since the time when Mrs. Archer had so tragically announced that he and she could not sit at the same table, a complete change in the seating arrangements had been effected. We still had Johnny with us, but in a far corner of the room, where, with his back to everybody else, he sat at a little table and thumped and thwacked and shouted and stormed as much as he pleased. His mamma and Aunt Jessie sat on either side, and though we could still hear the spoons and glasses ringing, and a dish now and then crashing to the floor, we none of us turned our heads, but went on with our own eating in far greater peace and quietness than we had known during Johnny's reign over us.

Our party was still further diminished by the absence of Philip and Ralph. They were always on hand at meal-time, and as the dinner drew to a close their unusual delay was noticed by us all. Mrs. Archer became quite alarmed for Philip's

safety, fearing that the two boys had wandered away so far that they had lost themselves, and were now, perhaps, straying farther and farther from home. Mr. Sinclair also seemed anxious as time passed and they did not return.

Mrs. Todd, however, who had become accustomed to Ralph's frequent disappearances and his usually safe returns, would not look at the matter in any but a cheerful light, and was sure both boys would soon be back safe and sound and clamoring for their dinners.

When the hour of two approached I left them all out on the lawn under the trees, and stole away to my own room, to watch for Frank to appear at the old stump, which was plainly visible from my window. I feared that he might not keep his appointment and was preparing to be disappointed when I saw him hurrying round the corner of the house, as if fearing he might be late, and peering all about for me. I was glad to see an eager look on his face and hastened down the stairs and out to the trysting-place as quickly as possible, that he might not feel chilled by any delay on my part.

"Here I am, Frank," I called when I had nearly reached the stump, "and so glad to find you on time. Now let us go for a good walk."

Frank looked shy and as usual had nothing to say, but he smiled as he got up from his stump and came to meet me.

"But where is your dog?" I asked in surprise. "I do not see Laddie."

"I tied him up," he said timidly. "I thought maybe you would n't like to have him go."

"Oh, of course Laddie must go. We must n't think of going without him—especially when he knows all about it, and helped to make the appointment. Run quickly and untie him, my dear."

Frank looked happy at this, and saying, "He did hate to be left behind dreadfully," limped off as quickly as he could to set his loving little comrade at liberty.

Presently the boy and the dog appeared, coming as fast as they could to where I stood, Laddie running and jumping and whirling himself about in a perfect frenzy of delight.

"That is all right now," I said, patting Laddie's head as they came up to me. "Now where shall we go?"

"You said something about finding where those flowers grew," Frank said diffidently.

"So I did. That shall be our first walk, if it is not too far for me to go. Where is it, my dear?"

"Just up a little way on Mount Eyre," he responded brightly, pointing to his right.

"That will be a pleasant walk for us," I said, for it was a well-beaten track in and out among the trees, with sunlight and shadow dancing

across the path where the branches waved in the cool breezes of the lovely midsummer day.

It was the same road up which Ralph had climbed so quickly in the morning. I had never strolled in just this direction myself, however, and I was glad of it now, for it afforded me an easy opportunity to become better acquainted with my young companion. It was evident that he had been over the ground many times, and in pointing out a bit of pretty moss or lichen here and there, or perhaps a delicate vine trailing at our feet, or a dainty blossom half hidden among its leaves, he soon forgot his shyness, and began to talk like anybody else. In fact he chattered as eagerly as Philip himself, though scarcely with that easy fluency which gave to Philip's speech the peculiar charm of which we were all so conscious. Frank's words came more slowly, and sometimes with a slight hesitation, as if he could not at once find the one he wanted, but I was more than half convinced that this arose from lack of practice in talking and believed that time and the society of sympathetic companions, if such could be found, would remedy this slight defect.

We rambled on to find where the flowers grew, becoming better friends with every step. When I thought it over afterward, I was astonished to find how much I learned about my young friend in the course of that short after-

noon. As soon as the ice was fairly broken between us, he seemed glad to pour out his whole heart to me, to take me completely into his confidence and reveal those secrets of his lonely young life which had so often puzzled me.

Thus I learned of his intense love for the mountains, and how he spent his time day after day among the forest trees, or roaming from hill to hill, following a winding stream, or an old, deserted bark road, seeking always for new and strange things in nature to study and to love. I discovered a keen insight into the ways of birds and animals, which seemed remarkable in one so young. He might not know the names of all the creatures he saw, but he was familiar with their habits and knew all about their homes. He showed me where a little screech-owl lived in its den within a hollow stump, and where the chickadee built its nest in a rotten branch. He knew, too, where a certain hoary hermit of a woodchuck dwelt in its hole under a stump and where the muskrats swam about in the marshy pool fed by a mountain brook.

Then, within a few short rods, as we rambled on, he pointed out a dozen different varieties of mosses which I fear my own old eyes would never have been sharp enough to find. He scrambled up the steep hillside, where I thought he could not go with his limping foot, to pluck and bring to me a bit of beautiful climbing fern.

But it was not until we had reached the place where the flowers grew which had led to our comradeship, that I learned what I most longed to know. When we had turned aside from the path and picked our way among stones and brush down the side of the mountain, he led me to an old mossy log, and showed me where, at one end of it, he had found his flowers. The plants were there, but with no blossoms now, for he had plucked them all in his eager desire to give me pleasure. Farther down the hill we could see some of the bright bluebells gleaming among the leaves and brush. It was a lovely spot, shaded by the branches of a huge chestnut-tree, and when we had talked a little about the flowers and Frank had scrambled down the hill to pick some more, we sat down to rest upon the old log.

There it was that I learned, at length, poor Frank's side of the story of his strange and lonely life, which had already been told me by his aunt and sister, each in her own way.

"You see, Miss Agatha," he said, after we had talked a long time and he had spoken freely about his home life, "you see I can't remember the time when I did n't know that Philip was the one they loved and were proud of, and that they were all ashamed of me because I was lame and awkward and near-sighted. When we were little fellows I can remember how pleased Aunt Mar-

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garet was to take Philip to places, but she never wanted me, and when there was company at home she would always have Philip come into the parlor and show off, but she sent me back if I wanted to go too. By and by Philip would come out and tell me how the people praised him and how father looked so pleased and Aunt Margaret was so proud of him. It used to hurt me even then when I was such a tiny little fellow, to think I could not have some of the good times too. I'd run away by myself and cry, but I would n't let one of 'em know how I felt about it, any more than I will now," and there was a fierce, proud look in his eyes.

"Then I'd feel," he went on, "as if I hated Aunt Margaret, just as I knew she hated me. And I'd hate everybody, because I felt so lonesome and bad. By and by, as we grew a little older, things were worse and worse. I could see how they all just worshiped Philip, because of his good looks and because he was bright and quick, and never shy or afraid to talk to any one. Aunt Margaret and Madge were always taking him with them, but they never wanted to take me, and Aunt Margaret told me every day how ashamed she was of the way I looked and acted. After awhile I could n't bear to be in the room with any of them, because they were always hurting me somehow, and I learned to stay alone and amuse myself as well as I could.

"But it was dreadfully hard work, and it 's been hard even till now. If it had n't been for Laddie I do n't know what I 'd have done," he continued, with a little sigh, as he stroked the head of the dog as he lay curled up on the log beside him. "And even Laddie is n't my own dog," he added. "A lady gave him to Philip, but Philip has never cared for him and would n't look after him."

"But, my dear, did you actually have no one to be good to you and care for you even when you were a little child?"

"There was always a nurse when I was little, and Aunt Margaret, and father, too, would see that I had food and clothes, of course, if that is what you mean, Miss Agatha."

"I think I meant something more than that, my child," I said.

"Once I had a nurse I just loved, she was so good to me, and somehow she always seemed sorry for me. But she did n't stay long. She had some trouble with Aunt Margaret, I do n't know what, and was sent away.

"Miss Agatha," continued Frank, after a brief pause, looking up into my face with his eyes shining, "I suppose you will think it queer, but I do feel that I have always had one person to love me."

"Who, my dear?"

"I think I have my own mother," he answered.

"I have always felt that she did love me while she lived, and somehow it seems as if she does now, only I can't know about it as I would if she were here. That has always helped me when I was feeling the worst, Miss Agatha."

"It is a sweet thought, my boy, and I am glad it comes to you," I said. "I believe with you that it is true that your dear mother does see and love you very tenderly, though we cannot see her."

"Miss Agatha, I want to tell you something else. Last winter I was up in the attic at home, and there in an old trunk I found a letter from my mother to my father. Perhaps it was n't right, but I read it, and I 'm glad I did, for it was full of love for us all, for Madge and Philip and me. I suppose father was away somewhere and she was telling him about us, and oh, she spoke so tenderly of me, Miss Agatha! She said that I had been ill but was better, and how thankful she was that I had been saved for father and her,— but I do n't think I can tell even you, Miss Agatha, all that my mother said in that letter."

Frank's eyes filled, and his voice broke into a little sob.

"But I shall never forget what she said," he went on, "and I have the letter safe. I did n't think it wrong to take it out of the old trunk and keep it. Do you, Miss Agatha? And now when I get to feeling as I did the other day, I go and

get the letter and read it, and then I know I have my own mother to care for me anyway."

"Yes, indeed, my dear," I said, "and I am very glad you have her precious words to think of and to dwell upon again and again. I do not doubt, dear Frank, that they will prove the strongest safeguard you can have for all your future life. If you are ever tempted to do wrong you must think of the letter, and then, I believe, you will not go far astray."

"I know my mother would have wished me to be good, and I do mean to be if I can," said Frank, with a sigh; "only I don't know that I shall ever be able to manage it, for I do get such spells of hating everybody. You see it is so hard to feel that they are all ashamed of me because I am a cripple and ugly in my face. And then it's hardest of all to have them think I don't know anything, when all the time I know in my own mind that it isn't so." There was a touch of indignation in his tone. "I know I'm not almost a fool, as Aunt Margaret thinks I am. I know that I could do something if they would n't all show me that they think I can't. In school, when our teacher calls on me to recite I know my lesson perfectly, but I get so frightened for fear he'll think I don't know it that I begin to tremble and stammer, and then Philip puts up his hand and answers for me. Mr. Lawton lets him

go on and praises him for having his lessons so well and just looks pityingly at me, because he thinks I don't know enough to be able to learn anything.

"Then he tells father how bright Philip is, and I don't know what he says about me, but I suppose it 's something bad, for they all think now I can't learn anything in school. And all the time I do have my lessons, Miss Agatha, if I could only get the words out."

"It is the teacher's fault," I said indignantly. "He is no teacher at all, and Philip is very wrong not to wait for you. How is it that he does n't? He knows you better than to think you cannot learn, does he not?"

"Oh, yes, of course Philip knows just how it is with me."

"Then why does he not help you instead of taking the words out of your mouth in that way?"

"I don't know," said Frank, with some hesitation. "Miss Agatha," he went on in a moment, "Philip is sometimes very good to me, and when we are alone and he has no one else to be with, I often think he cares for me a little, though not as I do for him. But then, again, sometimes he hurts me more than any one else, but I can't tell you how, for I love Philip. He is just like myself to me, I love him so, and I could n't tell any body how he hurts me."

"I can see for myself," I said, "that he is not all that he should be to his twin brother. And I think I know without your telling me, Frank, why he does not give you a chance to recite your lessons." For I had seen for some time that Philip's besetting sins were selfishness and an undue love of praise, and in his greedy desire to win his teacher's approbation, he was probably only too ready to let his nimble tongue outstrip his slower brother's. "I think," I said, "that I shall have a little talk with Philip."

"Oh, no," exclaimed Frank, in distress. "Please, Miss Agatha, do n't do that. It would only make Philip angry with me, and it would n't do any good. Now, when we are alone, he is often very good to me, and I do think he cares for me a little. We study together, and he tells me all his secrets and what he does and where he goes, and you know that is a great deal," said Frank, trying to speak very cheerfully. "O Miss Agatha, you would spoil all that if you said anything. Please do n't."

"Very well, then, I will not if you do not wish it, but still, I think he is very wrong."

"It 's not so much Philip's fault," said Frank; "it 's Aunt Margaret's. She 's the one who 's made them all ashamed of me. She 's set my own father against me, and made Madge hate to be seen with me. Oh, how I hate Aunt Margaret!" He doubled up his fist and a deep scowl

came on his face. "I can't remember the time when I did n't hate her. She 's never spoken a really kind word to me yet, and she always looks at me as if I were a snake. I wish sometimes I was—would n't I bite her!"

"Oh, but, my dear," I put in, "you must not hate your aunt, or any one else, Frank. You are all wrong. 'Love your enemies'" ——

"Not Aunt Margaret. I will never do that," said Frank firmly. Then he went on, "But after all, I would n't mind so much all she 's made me suffer if she had n't set my father against me. O Miss Agatha," and the little fellow broke down, hiding his face, wet with tears, against my shoulder, "that is what I can't bear. I could stand anything else if only my father did n't despise me so. I do love my father. There is no one in the world I love as I do him, and it almost kills me when he looks at me the way he did the other day at dinner. Oh, I 'd do anything in the world—sometimes I think I 'd be willing to die, Miss Agatha," the words were uttered solemnly, "if I could only just once see my father look at me and put his arm around me as he does around Philip every day. But he never did in all my life that I can remember, and I do n't suppose he ever will. It 's Aunt Margaret who 's done it all. She hates to see me around because I 'm lame and because I can't see like other people, and father always thinks just as she does," he

finished, with discernment beyond his years. "And so does Madge, too; she 's 'most as bad as Aunt Margaret."

"But, my dear Frank, you do not hate your sister? Madge does n't mean to be unkind to you," I said.

"No, but how she speaks about me!" said Frank bitterly. "'Philip, you should n't laugh at poor Frank so. He can't help it if he is n't like you.'" Frank's lip curled scornfully as he quoted Madge. "Always pitying me because she thinks I 'm a fool. I hate that as much as anything else. Yes, I hate Aunt Margaret and Madge and everybody else except father. I can't hate him. But it hurts me dreadfully to have him think I do n't know anything, and am only a disgrace to him. He feels so sorry that I 'm the one that was named for him, too." He dashed his hand to his eyes to brush away the tears. "All I 'd ask would be to have him care for me just a little, and not give it all to Philip. Sometimes I almost think I hate Philip because he has so much and I so little, but I know I do n't, even when I try to the most, for he 's just like myself to me, and I can't bear that anything should hurt him any more than to be hurt myself. I almost think I do hate him though, Miss Agatha, when he makes fun of me before everybody, and then when he tells some of his dreadful—but I won't say anything about that,"

and Frank stopped suddenly in confusion. "But that's the way I feel toward everybody, Miss Agatha," he continued, "when everything goes wrong and I seem all black inside of me."

Here the boy broke out into bitter weeping again, and for my part I cried with him, as I put my arm about his shoulder and held him close. For it seemed such a cruel thing that this young soul should thus early have become distorted with passions he should never have known at his tender age. Envy, suspicion, jealousy, rage, despair were there, but even among them all I could still find the warm, loving heart, eager to pour out its affection upon its nearest and dearest, that sad little heart longing for the opportunity to love and to be loved.

Again I resolved that I would be the child's friend while my life should last. I sat silent, holding him close within my arm, for I could not yet command my voice to speak.

Suddenly Frank wiped away his tears and put his arm around my neck in an impulsive fashion.

"O Miss Agatha," he said, "do n't think I meant you when I said I hated everybody. I could never hate you, for I do truly love you, Miss Agatha. No one was ever half so good to me as you. I know Madge and Philip say you are an old, old maid, with a little, dried-up, homely face, but to me your face is just beauti-

ful and I love to look at it. Oh, I'm glad you are my own friend, Miss Agatha!" And Frank hugged me again.

"Yes, dear," I said, "always your faithful old friend. And it is very true what Madge and Philip say," I went on, with perhaps the least little pang, for who likes to be called old and withered? "I am a little old maid, and never was beautiful, even when I was young like Madge, but my heart is not wrinkled, even if my face is, and it is brimful of love for you, my little lonely boy, and always will be." And as I held him clasped in my arms, again I prayed that I might be a wise counselor, a helper and comforter to one who seemed so strangely neglected by father, by brother, by sister, by all.

Just here, Frank, who had evidently been pursuing quite another train of thought, broke in upon my silent musings.

"And your clothes are *not* queer and old-fashioned and prim, and they *don't* look as if they came out of the ark," he declared sternly. "When I heard Aunt Margaret say that the other day, I just wanted to take her and put her in a bare, cold room with nothing to eat but bread and water, and keep her there for weeks and weeks!"

But here I could not refrain from a hearty laugh. To think of this valiant little knight

longing to rush into battle in behalf of an old woman like me!

Frank glanced up at me with a startled, shocked expression. That I should laugh at such a moment, when he was pouring out his whole wrathful heart, with his eyes sending forth indignant sparks through their glasses!

"Oh, my dear," I said, "what does it matter? If you find my old face kind and true, why should I mind the others? And as for my clothes, it is not the first time they have been called quaint and old-fashioned. Let it all go, dear; we will waste no more thought upon it. You are like the knights of olden times, Frank, who were always riding forth to fight for maidens in distress, only the maidens were never anything but young and beautiful. Did you ever hear about them—how they stopped for nothing, but even slew great giants, when they came in their way?"

"Yes, indeed," said Frank, "I've read a lot about 'em in a book at home."

"I think I shall have to call you my own little knight, and get you to fight some giants for me, by and by. There are quite a number I would like to see killed. Will you, Frank?"

"Why, what do you mean, Miss Agatha? Of course I know there are no giants really."

"Not any who are really visible to our eyes,

of course, but nevertheless there are some very terrible ones, strong and powerful and very wicked. I want you to destroy them for me. Promise that you will try."

"I don't know what you can mean, Miss Agatha. Tell me more."

"No, not to-day," I said. "It is almost time to go home. We will talk of them another day. But I want you to be my own brave knight, and fight them for me all you can."

"I think it's queer," said Frank, looking much puzzled.

"I suppose it is," I answered laughingly. "But never mind now. See, the sun is getting lower, and we must go home. Promise me, though, before we start, that you will try to conquer these grim old giants."

"Of course I will if I can, Miss Agatha," said Frank, still greatly mystified. Then we rose from the old log and started up the hill to find the homeward path.

Presently Frank asked me to let him show me something if I was not too tired. "It will only take a minute, Miss Agatha. It's a little house I've built for myself. I call it my castle."

"I should like to see it," I said. "And that is just as it should be, for knights ought to have castles, of course."

Frank laughed a little at this, and we trudged

on through some bushes until we came to a small clearing of a few rods in extent. It was a pleasant, shady little nook, softly carpeted with grass and vines and tufts of mountain-pine. Here and there lay the huge trunk of a tree felled to the ground and stripped of its bark to slowly whiten and decay in the sun and storm of succeeding seasons. On three sides stood the living brothers of these fallen forest giants, tall oaks and tulip-trees which stretched their limbs far out over their stricken mates and seemed to stand as sentinels guarding their long sleep and making a gentle moan with rustling leaves and swaying branches, as the wind swept their great boughs to and fro.

A steep hillside covered with the wealth of forest which is everywhere so abundant in these regions, stood on the north of this sheltered spot, and here Frank had built, or, rather, had finished the "castle" which nature, long ages before, had partly prepared for him.

Some time in the dim past, nobody may say how long ago, a huge boulder had stood in the hollow of this hill where it sloped down so sharply to meet the level ground. By the silent, slow, resistless action of the frosts of countless winters it had been rent asunder, and during the long centuries the two halves had drifted apart so that now they stood two or three yards from each other, forming upright walls of several feet

in thickness, and about the height of a man's head. The same mighty forces had brought from the hillside another boulder, which resting across these two made a sort of roof with a curiously rounded top.

When Frank discovered this natural curiosity and stepped within the little enclosure bounded by the stone walls, he saw at once how easily he could supplement the roof and fill in the spaces between the stones and the hillside with branches from the bushes and low-growing trees near by. The idea of having this solitary hermitage, this "castle" as he called it, all to himself, had pleased him, and he had spent hours, first in trudging back and forth with stones to set against the outer walls, by means of which he could reach the roof, and then in getting the boughs with which he filled it in and made all compact and snug.

I could imagine that the lonely boy had known some truly happy moments while engaged in this arduous labor, and now it was with a look of pride and pleasure that he ushered me through the open doorway into the cool, shady room with its carpet of grass and its ceiling of sweet-smelling branches, through which a few strips of blue sky were still visible.

In one corner was a round block of wood, which had at some time been cut from a log and then rejected and left behind by the shingle-cutters.

This served as a seat for Frank when he did not wish to lie at full length upon his carpet, as I could see he had recently done, for an open book lay on the grass in one of the corners. There was another block of the same shape and size as the stool, which was evidently used as a table, and on it were placed various little articles I was at once invited to inspect.

These were curiosities in the way of stones, snail-shells, bits of odd and pretty mosses, and a number of Indian arrow-heads which the boy had picked up in his walks and which I saw were highly prized. There were freshly gathered flowers, in an old tin can, it is true, but still arranged with taste.

After I had expressed my admiration for Frank's little treasures, I picked up his book, for I was interested to find out what he had been reading. It was an old, much-bethumbed copy of Hawthorne's "Tanglewood Tales," a dear friend of my own childhood, so far, far back.

"Do you like it, Frank?" I asked.

"Oh, do n't I!" he exclaimed. "I 've read it all through once, and now I 'm going over it again to tell to Philip."

"Why? Can't Philip read it for himself?" I inquired.

"Oh, yes, of course he could," said Frank. "But he has so much to do up here, and, besides,

I love to read better than he does, so I read things and tell him about 'em afterward. But I can't get much up here, of course," he added, rather disconsolately.

"Then you are fond of books," I said.

"I love them better than anything else."

"Do not your people know how you like to read?" I asked, wondering how they could think a child of eleven who was so fond of books could be at all lacking in intellect.

"I do n't know," answered Frank. "I suppose they see me reading at home sometimes. Nobody pays any attention to what I do, you know, Miss Agatha."

"I am sure you recite, too, probably as well as Philip," I said, remembering the time I had heard him prompt his brother.

"Oh, no, I could not recite as Philip does. Of course I know all Phil's pieces and more besides. He always learns his pieces with me, but I never could get up and say them before people as he does. Is n't it beautiful to hear him, Miss Agatha? I do love to watch Philip when he speaks," said Frank enthusiastically.

"Yes, dear, he speaks well," I agreed, "but I wish you would show your father that you can do it also. Will you not try some time, if I ask you?"

"No, no!" he cried in alarm. "Oh, never ask me, Miss Agatha. I could not even stand up

before them and feel Aunt Margaret's cold eyes on me and father looking so ashamed. O Miss Agatha, you would not do it!" Poor Frank actually grew pale as he thought of the horror such a moment would bring to him.

"No, no, my dear, of course I will never say a word if you do not wish it. We will think of it no more." Then to change the current of his thoughts I said, "This is Mrs. Dale's book, I see," for it had her name on the fly-leaf. "Did she lend it to you?"

"No, Miss Agatha, she didn't," answered Frank, rather shamefacedly. "I saw it in the bookcase in the parlor the day I came, and I've been longing ever since to read it, but I didn't like to ask anybody for it, till the other day old Jone said he'd get it for me."

"Old Jone!" I repeated in surprise.

"Yes, you know who old Jone is, that old colored man that does chores round the house. One day I found his little grandchild up here in the woods. She'd cut her foot dreadfully and was crying like everything, and I carried her home to her mother. It was hard work, for she's a fat little thing. Ever since that old Jone's been just as kind to me as he can be, and he wanted to do something for me right away. I don't know how I came to, but I told him I wanted to read this book, and he went to Mrs. Dale and asked her for it. Wasn't he good?

And there's another book there, too," Frank went on, "that I want awfully, and Jone says he'll get it, when I finish this one."

"But, Frank, Mrs. Dale would let you take any book she has," I said. "Why not ask her yourself?"

"Oh, no, I could n't." Frank shrank away from me, and for a moment seemed about to shut himself up in his shell again. "I could n't ask anything from any of them. Do n't ask me to, Miss Agatha. I like to keep by myself, just as I have been all the time; only to have you, Miss Agatha, for you are my own friend."

My poor little lad! He looked at everything and everybody, not only through his own near-sighted glasses, but through those cloudy, distorted spectacles of doubt, suspicion and timid aversion, as well. I would not say anything now, for it was not a proper moment, but before long I hoped to help him to a brighter, braver outlook upon life and the fellow beings around him than he seemed able to gain at present.

"We must go now, Frank," I said, presently, getting up from the stool where he had seated me. "But I hope you will often bring me to this little castle of yours, and that we may have many good talks together here."

So once more we started for home. Frank knew a shorter way than the path by which we had come, and led me on until we came to a

noisy little brook bubbling and shimmering along over its stones.

"Oh, stop a moment, Miss Agatha, and see my fish," he begged.

We took a few steps more to a place where the brook fell over some rocks, forming a pool below. As Frank approached this still little sheet of water a school of minnows came swimming up, quite as if they knew and wished to welcome him. He took a piece of corn bread from his pocket and threw some crumbs to them. The little creatures darting up from the water eagerly seized it, each more anxious than the others in their greedy haste.

Again Frank flung his crumbs, and we laughed to see the tiny things dart about, tumbling over each other, flirting their tails and making their silver sides glitter in the sunlight.

"Old Jone gives me a piece of bread every day," he explained, "and I come down here and feed them. There is another fellow, too, who wants his dinner. Do you see that old bullfrog over there, Miss Agatha?" and he pointed to an immense frog sitting among some weeds on the opposite bank. "He sits there every day, and waits till the fish have had their dinner, and then he expects his."

Frank took a tin box from his pocket, and picking out a fat angleworm threw it on the bank close to the bullfrog. The old fellow

seemed to pay no attention to it for a moment, then suddenly turned, waited another second, and in the twinkling of an eye the worm was gone. Then he resumed his former position, and, apparently asleep, waited until Frank threw another worm, when he went through the performance again.

We were talking merrily about this odd pet, when all at once the boy called out, "Hark!" and began to listen intently.

"O Miss Agatha, I heard Philip's voice," he cried. "Something is the matter. There it is again! Do you hear?"

Yes, I heard now. Some one was calling, "Frank, where are you? O Frank, come!"

"It is Philip," said Frank, grown pale with fright. "Something dreadful must be the matter. Yes, Philip, I'm coming," he called as loudly as he could, and started up the hill in the direction of the cry.

CHAPTER VII

RALPH'S ACCIDENT

As Frank hurried up the hillside, suddenly some bushes in front of him parted, and I saw Philip's face, wild with terror. When he beheld Frank, he rushed to him, falling into his arms and sobbing convulsively.

"Phil, what is it? What's frightened you so?" I heard Frank say.

"O Frank," Philip exclaimed with a gasp, "we've been lost all day, and now I'm afraid Ralph is killed! He's lying under a tree, and he doesn't stir. Oh, I am sure he's dead! O Frank, I'm so frightened!" And Philip sank to the ground, trembling all over and crying as if his heart would break.

By this time I had climbed the steep hillside and reached the two brothers. "What is it about poor Ralph?" I cried. "Let us go to him. Where is he, Philip?"

Philip seemed bewildered. "Oh, I don't know where he is," he said. "When I saw him lying there so white I just ran—anywhere, I was so frightened. I came down the hill just as fast as I could. He's up there under a tree. He

climbed way up to the top to see if he could n't find out where we were, and when he was up in one of the high branches, it broke, and he fell clear to the ground, and he 's dead." Philip began to tremble more violently than ever.

"I cannot believe it!" I exclaimed. "He may be only stunned by his fall. Come, dear Philip, and show us where to go. We must find him."

"But I do n't know where it is. I 'm all turned around," said Philip miserably.

"Is it far from here?" asked Frank.

"No; because I began to call you right away. It just seemed as if I *must* get to you, Frank, and in a minute or two I heard you answer."

"Come, Frank," said I, "you and I must try to find him. Let poor Philip stay here and rest."

"No, no," cried Philip. "I 'm afraid to stay alone. I must go where Frank goes."

"Yes, Miss Agatha," said Frank decidedly, "it is better that he should keep with us. He is frightened. Come, Philip."

Philip got up from the ground, and Frank led the way up the hill through the bushes where Philip had first appeared to us. Even as I was hurrying on with my heart full of anxiety and distress for Ralph, I could not help a passing feeling of surprise that Philip should exhibit such fear. It was so unlike all I had hitherto known of his character. He delighted so in tales of bravery and daring, and was a boy of such

sturdy, manly appearance. All at once, however, he had utterly broken down, and was stricken not only with grief but with fear, at the thought of his comrade's condition.

But there was no time to think of such things now, and I hastened after Frank with my whole mind given to Ralph.

We could see by the trampled branches the way Philip had taken through the bushes. It led us to an open space on the brow of the hill, where a number of trees stood in irregular groups. Under one of these I saw a dark object lying.

"Oh, I see him!" I cried with a pang of fear, for he lay very still. But the next moment I exclaimed, "He is not dead, Philip. See, he moves his foot."

I never knew how we sped over the ground, but in a moment we were around poor Ralph and gazing into his white face, drawn with pain. He was just regaining consciousness, but seemed not to notice us.

"Oh, my dear boy," I cried, kneeling by him, "where are you hurt? Can you speak to me, Ralph?"

Slowly and uncertainly he looked about him till his glance at length fell on my anxious face bending over him. "It 's Miss Agatha!" he said, surprised.

"Yes, Ralph. Tell me where you are hurt, my boy."

"I don't know that I'm hurt anywhere," he answered. "I feel queer. Oh, my arm hurts! What's the matter with it? Oh, now I know. I fell out of the tree, Miss Agatha."

"Yes, dear, we know you did. Don't try to move." For I saw from his face that he was becoming very conscious of pain, and observed how helplessly his arm lay by his side. I felt sure it was broken. "You are better now, Ralph," I went on, endeavoring to speak cheerfully. "You were a little stunned by your fall."

I was kneeling beside him with his other hand in mine, trying to plan how to get him home. It would be impossible for us to carry him, yet he must be taken there as soon as it could be managed, for his pain was increasing.

"Something's wrong with my foot, too, Miss Agatha," he said feebly. "It hurts like everything. And all down my side I ache so."

"Philip," I said, "run down as fast as you can to the house, and tell them about it. Ask them to come quickly to help us."

But Philip hung back. "Oh, I don't know the way," he said.

"That is so," said I. "Then, Frank, you must go, and Philip can stay with me. And Frank," I whispered, "tell them they ought to send at once for a doctor. Come back with them yourself, for you are the only one who knows the way."

Frank started off as quickly as he could, run-

ning and limping along over the stones and briers. When next I turned my head in that direction, I perceived that Philip was hastening after him. I had wished him to remain with me, but perhaps it was just as well. The poor boy was worn out with the troubles of the day, utterly unstrung, and no doubt faint with hunger. So I settled down to watch over poor Ralph, who was evidently in much suffering. Great tears coursed slowly down his pale cheeks, though he manfully endeavored to suppress them and even looked up at me now and then, trying to say a merry word after his own old fashion.

"Oh, it's nothing much, Miss Agatha. I know just what it is. My arm's broken. I broke it once before, and it feels exactly as it did then, only this time it's higher up, I guess. I don't mind it much, though of course it hurts some. But my foot's just howling down there. What do you suppose is the matter with that?"

"I don't know, dear, but we'll soon have it helped when you get home. I don't quite like to take off your shoe."

"No, Miss Agatha. I couldn't stand that; it hurts dreadfully as it is. My head hurts, too."

"But that is only a bad bruise, I hope, Ralph. O my dear, just think how it might have been! I cannot see how you escaped with your life, falling from that high tree."

"We lost our way," he explained. "We had wandered all over the mountain ever since noon, trying to find the hotel or to get home. And we were so tired and hungry! So I climbed up there to see where we were. I found where *I* was in about two minutes," he went on, trying to grin, though his face was puckered with pain. "I was flying through the air on the limb of the tree just like a witch on a broomstick. Only I did n't stop to think of that then."

"Oh, do n't try to joke about it now, dear," I said, wiping some tears from his eyes.

"We might as well laugh as cry, Miss Agatha," he answered brightly. "Besides, it 's only a broken arm, and I 've had that before. It 'll be all right when it 's set, only of course they 'll keep me in bed with it till I 'm most dead. That 'll be the worst of it, and all this summer's fun 's gone up now, of course. Just my luck!" he grumbled.

"My dear Ralph, do keep quiet," I begged. He looked very pale and I was anxious. It seemed as if no one would ever come. The sun was almost down behind the trees and twilight close at hand. I had managed to place Ralph's head in my lap, and sat as motionless as I could so that I might not jar him. We were silent a long time. I wiped away the tears which he could not succeed in keeping back. A whip-poorwill flew into a branch near by, on the very

tree which had proved so disastrous to Ralph, and sat there swinging himself and singing.

"Whippoorwill," said the boy. "It ought to be 'WhippoorRalph,' for I do feel as if I 'd been whipped and thrashed from my head to my toes. Oh, will they never come, Miss Agatha?"

"Be patient a little longer. They will surely be here soon, now."

Presently there came a quizzical little wrinkle in Ralph's eyebrows, and a half smile on his mouth. "Miss Agatha, I did find 'em, after all, did n't I?" he said.

"What did you find, Ralph?"

"Why, my feelings, of course. Don't you remember I said I was going to find 'em up here?"

"O Ralph, don't"—— I began, but here he happened in some way to give a twist to his injured arm, and with a sharp scream, suddenly fainted quite away, his head sinking heavily in my lap.

What could I do now, with no one near to run for water, or to aid in any way to restore this poor boy, who I feared was hurt more than he believed? The only thing was to place his head gently on the ground and then fly to a brook which I could hear gurgling over its stones, that same brook which earlier in the day Frank and I had visited farther down the hill. I filled my hat with the clear, cold water and hurried back.

There were only a few drops left by the time I reached poor Ralph, but they were enough. Slowly he came to himself again, and promising to mind me better, he lay very quietly for another quarter of an hour, with his head once more in my lap.

Finally I heard the sound of voices calling. Never had there been sweeter music in my ears. And through the bushes came Frank and Miss Jessie, bearing between them, with much difficulty, an old-fashioned canvas cot, whereon poor Ralph was to be carried home. But were they the only ones to come in this hour of distress? Where were the others? And how could we two women, with the aid of one small, lame boy, ever get Ralph down the mountain and safely home?

While Miss Jessie, full of the keenest anxiety for her injured nephew, bent over Ralph, Frank explained that when he and Philip reached home they found nobody there except Miss Jessie, Johnny and Aunt Mimy, for every one else was off searching for the missing boys, and Miss Jessie wrung her hands in dismay because of the sudden responsibility thrust upon her. How was Ralph to be brought home? How was the doctor to be summoned?

Finally the difficulty was solved by Aunt Mimy, who told Miss Jessie to tie Johnny to the door-knob and go up with the boys, while she would catch the horse and go for the doctor.

She brought out the old cot, and then waddled off to find her horse, which had been left behind in the general stampede only because he was too lame to be of any use. How she managed I do not know, for she had not been on a horse's back for twenty years and had supposed herself quite too fat to mount to the saddle. But in some way it was done, and a fine figure she must have presented, as she rode away on her limping steed in search of aid for her youthful enemy.

When Ralph overheard Frank telling me about it, he must have felt that this was returning good for evil with a right good will, for he looked up into my face and said between his groans:

"I don't deserve that from Aunt Mimy. I know I don't," and tears brought there not entirely by pain welled in his eyes.

Poor Philip had been too tired for anything but bed, so Miss Jessie and Frank had started on their toilsome journey up the mountain with the cot between them, leaving Johnny tied to the knob of the hall door.

All through Frank's story I was casting about in my mind how we could manage to lift Ralph to the cot without hurting him more sorely than he could bear. It seemed an impossible undertaking that we should carry him home in this manner, yet it must be attempted. We placed the cot close to him, and Miss Jessie was trying to draw a scarf, which I had taken from my

shoulders, beneath his back to aid us somewhat in lifting him, when, for the second time that day, Frank called out sharply, "Hark!

"It's father's voice," he added. "Father's coming. Here, father!" His voice rang out clear and strong and quite like Philip's. He was so happy that for the moment he was lifted out of himself. "This way, father!" he shouted joyfully. "Here we are."

In another moment or two Mr. Sinclair appeared at the edge of the wood, and behind him a great, strong, colored man, one of the farm-hands. What a welcome sight it was! Mr. Sinclair strode up to us, gave a strained glance at Ralph, then turned away with a look of relief that it was not his own son lying there. But the next moment he called sharply, "Where is Philip? I heard Philip's voice."

"It was Frank you heard, Mr. Sinclair," I said. "Philip is safe at home and unhurt."

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. He was evidently wearied almost to exhaustion, but a great load of care seemed to roll off with these words. Then we told him as quickly as we could the circumstances of our finding the two boys. "What a day this has been!" he said with a long sigh of fatigue and relief. "But if Philip is all right, all is right for me, and now I must think of this poor lad."

As for Miss Jessie and myself, we looked at

each other in silent thankfulness that stronger hands than ours were to bear our wounded boy safely home.

A moment or two later poor Ralph was carefully lifted by Mr. Sinclair and placed gently upon the cot, and with the two men carrying each an end of the improvised stretcher, we started for home.

I need not go into all the details of our arrival there. Suffice it to say that by the time we reached Glen Elsworth, every one else was there too, even the doctor, who had been the first to come galloping up to the door, and had found no one at home but Johnny asleep on the hall floor, worn out with crying.

It was the doctor who had received the first comers, Mrs. Archer and Madge, and had astonished and frightened them by his announcement that he had been hastily summoned to set a boy's broken arm.

"Who was the boy, and where was he?" were the not unnatural questions.

As the others came straggling home, one after another, from their fruitless search, no one could give any information until finally Aunt Mimy appeared limping up the road looking much the worse for wear, leading her lame horse.

When she arrived within hailing distance and could recover her breath sufficiently to speak, the whole mystery was solved.

"It's little Redhead," she gasped, taking off her turban and wiping the drops of perspiration from her shining brow. "He done fall out'n a tree. Lor'! doan' you fret, honey," she said to Mrs. Todd, who had given a sudden scream upon hearing of her boy's hurt, "he's boun' ter come out'n dat all er-right. I done sot right off fuh de doctor, an' heah he is, sure 'nuf. I tole him tuh trabble, an' I reckon dat's what he done. Doctor'll fix him all right. Doan' fret no mo', honey."

By this time our little procession was observed crawling slowly down the mountain path, and shortly afterward Ralph was in the doctor's hands, with his anxious mother and aunts bending over him and helping him to bear the ordeal of an examination of his bruised and battered frame and the setting of his broken arm.

How thankful I was to learn that after all the boy had been right when he had told me that it was only a broken arm! To be sure the toe which had caused him so much pain was found to be out of joint and there were ugly bruises on various parts of his body, but there were no internal injuries, as I had feared there might be. With attentive nursing, and by remaining quietly in bed for two or three weeks, as the doctor was particular to state, there seemed no reason why our young adventurer might not in a short time be up and about as lively as ever, and ready for

whatever new mishap fate might have in store for him.

"Lor', what 'd I tell ye now?" said Aunt Mimy, when the favorable report was retailed to her. "Dat ar' boy 's safe 'nuf, an' I knowed it all de time. Dat kin' doan' die young. Dar hain't 'nuf angel 'bout um. His mammy need n't fret 'bout him yet awhile, nor 'bout de leetle one, needer," she added with some sarcasm, but with a kindly twinkle in her eye.

After this exciting event we were all very quiet for several days. Poor Ralph was a prisoner in his bed, a most unwilling one after the first pain and discomfort of his broken arm had passed away. We elders spent much time at his bedside striving to brighten his dull hours, and to relieve his mother and aunts from the demand upon their time and attention which Ralph, who was in his way as great a tyrant as Johnny, was constantly making.

He missed Philip's society greatly; for Philip, though he did not mean to be unkind, was unused to a sick room and did not like to be shut up there, even to talk to the friend of whom he was so fond, and without whom he was at first lonely.

Perhaps it was for this reason that he and Frank were more frequently together. Several times I observed them walking about the mountain paths or lying on the grass in some shady spot reading from the same book. At such times

it was a pleasure to me to watch them. Both looked happy, and Frank, especially, wore a contented expression such as had rarely been seen on his face. He even confided to me in one of the rambles which we now were enjoying together and which were making us day by day better friends, that he had taken Philip to visit his castle, and that they had had good times up there together watching his pet fish and laughing at "Old Bloatie," as Philip had named the bullfrog.

After the first days of Ralph's illness, during which Philip had wandered about somewhat disconsolately, he gradually brightened up and became his own gay self. One day he came out on the lawn where we were all sitting, with one of his most thrilling adventures to relate to us. It was about Laddie, the dog.

It seemed that Philip had been roaming about in the woods, when he met several boys from the hotel up the mountain. He knew most of them quite well, for Mrs. Todd had several friends spending the summer at the hotel and their sons occasionally came down to Glen Elsworth to play with Ralph. Philip had been with Ralph several times to return these visits, and all of them were now on the familiar footing it is so natural for boys to assume upon short acquaintance. On this occasion they had been playing together for some time on an old bark road which ran along the steep mountainside, when presently they

heard a sound as of some animal crying in great distress. They ran on up the road a few steps, and there what should they see but poor Laddie, standing on an old rotten log which had, in its lifetime, bordered the upper edge of the road, but now lay fallen across it and stretched far out over the steep hillside which formed a precipice with tall trees and rocks below. Upon this frail bridge Laddie had ventured. Probably he had jumped upon it from the road, and had run along it a little way in a spirit of light-hearted curiosity, like many another traveler before him, anxious to explore new and untried fields.

However that may be, the little fellow had gone so far out that now when he wished to retrace his steps he found himself unable to turn about, either from not daring or not knowing how to do so. He stood there trembling and crying piteously, just managing to move his head toward the boys as they came up, as if to beg them to help him.

As Philip told us in his earnest way of the poor dog's plight, we seemed to see him standing there, and a thrill of pity crept over us all. "And what do you think that hateful Tom Murray did?" said Philip. "He was the biggest boy there, and instead of trying to think of some way to help Laddie to get back, he just took a long pole and poked him with it and pushed him farther out on the log than ever, and Laddie just

howled, he was so frightened. Oh, but I was mad," went on the boy, with his eyes flashing, "and I told Tom Murray to stop or I'd smash his nose for him, and he just laughed at me. Then the others all begged him to creep out on the log and get hold of Laddie, because he was bigger than we were and could reach him better than we could. But he would n't do it. He said he would n't risk his life out on an old rotten log like that for anybody in the world, let alone a good-for-nothing dog, and Laddie might stay there till he dropped for all he cared.

"But I just made up my mind Laddie should n't die that way," said Philip, all in a glow, "so I went out on that old log myself, though it did look as if it would break any minute, you know. I crept along just as softly as I could. I felt it crack when I got 'most to Laddie, but I reached 'way forward and got hold of him and held him close in my arms, and then I slid along backward to the road. The boys cheered like mad when I got off the log, and then they just pitched into Tom Murray, and called him a coward, till he was glad to sneak off home if he is bigger than any of us! I guess it will be one while before I play with him again," declared Philip, as he wound up his tale.

"But, my dearest boy, did you actually go out on that dreadful log yourself?" exclaimed Philip's aunt. "Oh, my child, never, never do

such a dangerous thing again! It terrifies me to think what might have happened," and real tears of anxious affection stood in Mrs. Archer's eyes as she thought of the peril her darling had been in.

"But I wanted to save Laddie, Aunt Margaret," said Philip.

Mr. Sinclair put his arm about Philip's shoulders and drew the boy close to him. I could see that he also was deeply affected. "It was a noble act, my boy, and I am thankful to have such a brave son, and yet—I am like your aunt, I could not tell you to do the same again. What are a hundred Laddies compared to my boy!" Then he got up rather quickly and walked away from us.

Philip looked excited and delighted that every one had praised him for his bravery. Well did he deserve it, I thought, so when he glanced at me for my approval also, I gave it with a right good will. "I am so glad," I added, "that you saved Laddie, dear Philip, not only for his own sake but for Frank's, too. How poor Frank would have suffered if he had lost the dog!

"Where was Frank?" I continued. "It seems strange to hear of Laddie away from Frank. Was he not somewhere near by?"

"Yes," said Philip, and suddenly he flushed and hesitated, then added in a low voice, "Frank was there."

What had come over the child? I looked at him in surprise, not understanding in the least how this simple allusion to his brother could work such a change in his manner. No one else seemed to observe it, however, and Madge said:

"It would n't have made any difference about Frank's being there. Laddie would have stood no chance at all of getting back if he had been left to Frank."

"How could Frank have gone," I asked, "when he is so lame? Much as he might have wished it, it would have been almost impossible for him to perform such a feat."

"And it is not at all likely that he would perform it if he could," said his aunt drily. "We have never observed any remarkable indications of daring on Frank's part as yet."

This was so like Mrs. Archer. She never let an opportunity pass of flinging some such little sarcasm as this at poor Frank, especially, I fancied, if I were by to hear it. For I knew that she had observed and was not pleased with my interest in the neglected boy.

As for Philip, he stood in silence while these remarks were going on around him. All the brightness had gone out of his face, and he hung his head, abstractedly kicking the toe of his boot against the trunk of a tree. After a few more words of loving caution from his anxious Aunt Margaret, he left us and walked quietly away.

CHAPTER VIII

MISS AGATHA PREACHES A LITTLE SERMON TO FRANK

ONE morning about a week after Ralph's accident, I said to Frank at the table, "Come to my room after breakfast, my dear. I have something there to show you."

I had been seated at my favorite window a few minutes only when I heard a gentle little knock, and through the partly opened door saw Frank, looking shy but evidently pleased to be invited to Miss Agatha's room and anxious to know what it was all about.

"Come in, Frank, and see what I have here," I said. On the table at my side lay spread out, in all their beautiful, bright bindings, a number of new books. I had lain awake through the long hours of the night after Ralph's accident, too excited to think of sleep, going over and over in my mind all that had happened during that eventful day, and pondering on Frank's story of his sad young life as he had confided it to me in such loving, impulsive fashion. I felt eager to help him, and it occurred to me that one of the first things to do would be to send for some books.

He should no longer be compelled to resort to such roundabout methods of procuring his reading material. So I planned a list of some twenty books which I thought he would like, and probably would not have read already, and in the morning I wrote to a bookseller with whom I had dealt for years, to send them to me at Glen Elsworth as quickly as possible.

And here they were, all displayed upon the table for Frank to feast his eyes upon! His eyes grew rounder and shone brighter through their glasses than I had ever yet seen them do when I told him they were all for him.

"O Miss Agatha, you can't mean it!" he said, with a little gasp of astonishment. "Not for me, all those books! Oh," he added, "you mean they are for me to read."

"I mean they are for you to have for your very own. I sent for them for you, Frank, and I have placed your name in each. See," and I showed him where I had written in every one of the volumes,

"FRANCIS SINCLAIR, JR.
"From his loving old friend,
"AGATHA POPPELHEIMER."

"O Miss Agatha!" he exclaimed again and then was silent. In a moment he came close to my side and laid his cheek softly against my

shoulder. "I don't know what to say," he began. "I want to tell you how I feel about it, but I don't know how. Nobody ever did such a thing for me before. Nobody was ever so good to me in all my life as you, Miss Agatha, and I don't know what makes you so, for I'm only Frank, you know, ugly and lame, whom nobody has ever cared two straws about."

"It is because you are my own little friend," I answered, "and because I love you and wish you to be happy. You do not need to tell me anything, for I know just what you would say and how pleased you are. I am only glad I happened to think of sending for them. Come, let us look them over together."

We spent some time admiring the covers, commenting upon the pictures, and deciding which should be the book for Frank to read first of all. Fortunately he had seen only two or three before, and those, he declared, he had often wished to read again. He hesitated long in his first choice, but finally fixed upon "Tom Brown at Rugby," to be followed by "Swiss Family Robinson."

"Oh, how I shall like to lie on the grass up at my castle and read, read, read!" he said joyously. "And all through you, dear, good Miss Agatha."

Then we considered where the precious treasures were to be kept. I told him he might leave them with me if he preferred to do so, or that he

could carry them to his own room if he could find a place for them there.

I found that he was anxious to have them quite in his own keeping.

"There is a shelf in there that looks as if it was just made for my new books," he said, "and there is n't a thing on it now. It will make me so happy to see them the first thing in the morning when I open my eyes. And besides," he continued, holding up his head proudly, a joyous thrill in his voice, "I want Philip to see what a beautiful present *I* have had."

Ah, I could read very well what was passing in the boy's mind. Hitherto, it had been Philip's lot to have favors and gifts showered upon him by friends, but now, *now*, it was his turn, and he would show Philip that he, too, had somebody to care for him! Perhaps it was an unworthy feeling for the child to possess, and I do not mean to claim that my little friend was without faults, and serious ones, too. Still, it was but natural, if one stops to think of it, that he who had been so cast off and shut out from the good things bestowed upon his more fortunate brother all their lives, should feel this wave of exultation pass over him, that he, too, had found some one who loved him, Frank, crippled as he was, and of no account to any one—some one who cared enough for him to give him more books at one time than Philip had all together.

"I want Philip to see them," he repeated. "Won't he just open his eyes, though?"

"You will let Philip read them, won't you, Frank?"

"Oh, yes, but I don't suppose he will want to read them. He'll want me to read 'em and then tell them to him. That's the way we do. You see, though he's ten times brighter than I am, and knows a great deal more about everything else, he doesn't like to read very well. So I read a book and tell him about it afterward. That's the way we manage."

Frank now trudged back and forth between my room and his own, bearing his precious treasures in his arms. He looked pleased and excited, with a bright flush on his cheeks, as he carried them away to deposit them in their new home on the long, empty shelf.

As he was gathering up his last load I proposed that in the afternoon we should go for another ramble on Mount Eyre, and visit his castle again, to which plan he assented eagerly. The fact was, that for a day or two I had been wishing to talk seriously to Frank, to scold him, as Ralph would have said; for though I was growing to love the little lad more and more every day, I could not be blind to faults which were only too visible, and against which I felt he should be warned.

Hitherto I had not entered upon these matters

with the child. In our walks we had spoken on many subjects, and, as I have already said, Frank had told me freely of his lonely childhood, his estrangement from his own people, especially of his longing for his father's love, and his bitter grieving that it should still seem so far from his possession. I had sympathized with him in everything. He knew that I felt he had been cruelly wronged by his aunt. Still, I did not dwell on these points, feeling it wiser to lead the boy's mind to brighter thoughts, encouraging him to hope that he would yet find warm, loving friends, and above all that he would some time succeed in winning his father's love, for which he longed more than for any other gift life could offer. But as yet I had said nothing of his own failings, though they stood out prominently enough, and to-day I proposed to undertake the task. I was the more impelled to perform this duty of a faithful friend, by a certain event which had transpired the day before.

So in the afternoon, when we had strolled about for some time among the pleasant paths and nooks and dells of Mount Eyre, and were at length resting before the doorway of Frank's castle, I opened my attack.

"Frank, my dear," I said, "I wish to speak to you very seriously about something, and you must not be angry with your old friend if she finds a little fault with you."

"What is it, Miss Agatha?" asked Frank, with a startled look.

"My dear, tell me why you were so naughty to your Aunt Margaret yesterday when she asked you what you had done with your pretty new necktie?"

"Because I hate her," he said, promptly, a scowl beginning to appear on his face.

"But, Frank, you cannot think that is right," I exclaimed.

"I can't help it. Whether it's right or whether it's wrong, I do hate her, and I always shall," he announced decisively.

"O Frank!" I said, and stopped there, for I hardly knew at the moment what I had best say. I wished to help the boy to a better state of mind, but it was hard to tell the right course to take in order to soften the passionate feeling which seemed to arise at the mere mention of his aunt's name.

"How can I help hating her?" demanded Frank. "Did you see how she looked at me when she asked me about it in that hateful way of hers which makes me fairly boil all over? If I had been one of those great tomato-worms which you are all so afraid of, she'd have looked at me in exactly the same way. And she scolded me before everybody, too. She need n't think I'll tell her what I did with it."

"But you did tell her, Frank. You said loudly

and sharply that you had thrown it away, and then you turned and hurried off looking so angry and sullen that I could hardly believe it was my own little friend Frank."

The boy was silent, and hung his head. He kicked some little stones about nervously and then said:

"I 'm sorry you heard me, Miss Agatha."

"Oh, do not be sorry for that, my dear," I replied. "Be sorry, rather, for the angry, disrespectful way in which you answered your aunt. I do not see how you could speak to her in such a tone and in such words. I know that her manner to you is not a pleasant one, still she has a right to ask what you do with your clothing. She stands in your mother's place to you."

"No, she does n't," said Frank, sternly. "She shall never stand in my mother's place to me."

"At least you were placed in her charge by your own father, and it is certainly your duty to give her the respect and obedience due to a parent. To roar out to her that you had thrown it away! That was not like what I thought my little friend would be. Did you really throw it away, Frank?"

"She would have called it throwing it away," said Frank, rather indistinctly. He dashed his hand to his eyes and brushed something away. I thought there were tears there, but he was

too proud or too indignant to wish me to see them, and I took no notice.

"Tell me about it, Frank. How did you lose the necktie?"

"It was one day last week," he answered. "I was climbing about on 'Old Bald Top,' and I came across a lamb that had cut its leg dreadfully, and it was bleeding so I thought something ought to be done to stop it. I had n't any handkerchief or anything else that I could think of but my necktie, so I took that off and bound it round the little thing's leg and carried it down to Uncle Jone's cabin. He said it was a good thing that I did it, because the lamb might have died if I had n't. I could n't have told Aunt Margaret all that if she 'd been the kindest aunt in the world, for all the other people were there, and I could n't have said it before them. But she 's so hateful I would n't have told it if I could."

"I think, though, it would have been the right thing to do, Frank," I said, "and I do not believe she would have blamed you for what you did if you had only explained it pleasantly and respectfully."

"Yes, she would," said Frank. "You do n't know her as I do. Perhaps she might not have said much there, but she 'd have looked at me all the same, and some time she 'd have told me what she thought of my wasting my necktie on a lamb."

I was silent, pondering what to say, for Frank, in spite of the fact that he was only a little boy who had lived much of his life alone, seemed to have his faculties for reasoning as well developed as many an older person. Perhaps it was because of his solitary way of living that he had thus early formed a habit of studying people and their motives of action so closely. At all events, I wished to lead him to look at some things in a different light, and yet did not like to chill his sensitive nature by any show of displeasure.

I sat silent so long that Frank finally gazed up into my face with a saddened look in his own eyes.

"Shall you not be my friend now, Miss Agatha," he said, "now that you know how bad I am about Aunt Margaret?"

"Oh, my dear, the best of friends," I exclaimed, quickly drawing the child close, and placing the dark head against my shoulder, "the very best of friends! Do you think I could give up my own little knight so soon, even if he is not always so good as I wish him to be, and does cause me some pain now and then? Do you remember, Frank, how you promised to be my knight the other day?"

Frank nodded his head as it rested against my shoulder and brushed away some more of those troublesome tears.

"And you said that you would do your best to make way with certain grim old giants whenever I should ask you."

Frank nodded again.

"Have you any idea who they are?"

"When I thought about it afterward I supposed it must be something about my faults." He gave a rueful little smile.

"Of course, my dear, that was just what I meant, only I did not like to call them by the plain and ugly name of 'faults.' I fancied you could resist them better if you thought of them as great, terrible giants, ready to rush down upon you and destroy you unless you could withstand them by fighting against them with all your might. That is what I want you to do, my boy. I want you to be brave and untiring in your struggle with these terrible foes, and never give up till you have conquered them. Now there is that frightful old fellow, the giant Hatred. Let us attack him first. I cannot bear to think that he should ever get my little friend in his horrible clutches. Will you not get your weapons ready to give battle to him, dear Frank?"

"What weapons?" said Frank, a little uneasily. "I have n't any weapons that I know of."

"There is one arrow you could fling at him right away, and it would give him a good, sharp prick, too. Try to think more kindly of your Aunt Margaret. If you could learn to lo"——

"Oh, not Aunt Margaret! You cannot ask me to even like Aunt Margaret, Miss Agatha," he exclaimed. "I have hated her from the very first that I can remember, and I don't know any other way. I'll try with other people if you want me to, Miss Agatha, though I've always said I never would like anybody till they liked me. But Aunt Margaret!" Frank gave an angry little sob. "Miss Agatha, I'll do anything for you but that. Please don't ask me."

I thought a moment. No, I would not ask it. It would be better not to attempt too much at first. "Then we'll begin with somebody else," I said cheerfully, "and who knows but some time we may get to Aunt Margaret herself."

"No, we never shall," declared Frank, stoutly.

"Well, never mind, we will fight our old giant with some other weapon. Let me see, is there not some one here to whom you could do some little act of kindness? I have always found that to begin by doing them little favors as opportunity offers is a very good way to learn to care for those around us. In that way we grow to have a kindly feeling toward them, to find out whatever fine and noble traits they may have, and so gradually the habit is formed of good will and charity and friendliness for everybody."

"But perhaps they don't all have good things about them," objected Frank.

"Oh, yes, I think there is no one living in

whom we could not discover some good trait, if we searched long enough."

"Even Aunt Margaret?" said Frank, incredulously.

"Even Aunt Margaret," I responded. "Surely," I went on, "this is a nobler way to feel than to say, as you did just now, that you would only like those who liked you. Think how selfish that would be! Why should we demand in return just the measure we give? Suppose you had a large, beautiful peach in your hand and should meet a schoolmate with a small apple. If he should say, 'Let's divide; you give me half your peach and I'll give you half my apple,' it might not be a fair exchange, for your peach is larger than his apple, besides being more mellow and juicy and better in every way. Still you would think it ungenerous to refuse, and so you would take out your knife and say, 'All right, so we will.' At least, I think you would, Frank."

"Oh, yes, of course," said Frank.

"I think it is just so about giving our love to our friends. Perhaps we have more loving hearts than they. There are some people who cannot love very much because they are not made that way. Perhaps we know that in our hearts is stored up far more affection than they can ever give us in return, but let us not mind that. Let us give freely of what we have, not asking or looking for much from them, taking with a cheer-

ful spirit the little they have to spare. Is not that the nobler, more generous way?"

"You said you thought all people had some love about them somewhere," said Frank, "but I don't think I've found very much of it."

"No, my dear, but perhaps you haven't gone the right way to look for it. You have always shunned everybody, shutting yourself up like an oyster in its shell, living your lonely hermit life, striving to keep as far away from those around you as you could, growing to have harsh, bitter thoughts about them, your heart full of anger, suspicion, even hatred,—all black within you, as I've heard you say,—how could you know and love them, or how could they know and love you? But, believe me, Frank, there is good in everybody. I am sure there is no one born into the world without some kindly feeling, some spark of love in his heart, if it can only be brought out, and we must try to find it in those among whom our lot is cast."

"I think it would take a good while to hunt up Aunt Margaret's spark," said Frank with some bitterness.

"Oh, my dear, don't speak so scornfully. You may be sure there is good in your Aunt Margaret as in everybody else, and some day you may find it. Meantime is there not something you can do for Madge or Philip? For, as I said just now, the best way to learn to care about

people is to seek to make them happy by some little deed of kindness, some timely favor, just as you brought me the flowers, you know. That broke all the ice between us. Now is there not something you can think of to do for Madge or Philip?"

"I always am good to Phil anyhow," said Frank. "I think too much of him to be bad to him. As for Madge, I do n't know what I could do for her; I hardly ever see her. And father, I 'd do anything in the world for him, but there 's nothing I can do," he ended with a sigh.

"We may think of something by and by," I said. "How about Ralph, laid up with his broken arm? It would be a real kindness if you could while away some of his weary moments."

"But how could I, Miss Agatha? I never amused him when he was well, except by my lameness and by not seeing an inch before my nose, and he 's not likely to be pleased with me when he 's sick. Besides, he 'd like Philip better than me."

"But I do n't think Philip is with him very much," I observed. "Is there not something we could think of?" I continued, reflectively.

"Nothing which Philip could n't do a thousand times better," said Frank, disconsolately. "Oh, there 's one thing I can do which Phil can't," he went on in a moment, with a brighter expression. "I can make up stories all day long. I always

tell stories to Philip when he gets frightened in the dark."

"What do you mean, Frank? How does Philip get frightened?"

"Oh, at night, very often. Sometimes he can't go to sleep because he's so afraid when the light's out. He's always been so. Isn't it queer? But he doesn't want anybody to know it, and I oughtn't to have said that. No one knows it but me, and I just cuddle up close to him and keep him warm and tell him stories till he drops off to sleep. I love to make 'em up when I'm all alone and then tell them to him afterward."

"But it seems so strange to hear that a boy like Philip, brave and manly enough to do what he did for Laddie the other day, should be timid in the dark. I cannot understand that," said I, feeling perplexed.

"What was it about Laddie?" asked Frank, in surprise.

"Why, you know all about it—how he crept out and brought him back the other day when Laddie went out on the log. Wasn't it a brave and noble act! How thankful you must have felt to Philip that he saved dear little Laddie!"

Frank gave me a perplexed, astounded look.

"Did Philip tell that, Miss Agatha?" he asked presently.

"Why, certainly, he told us all about it the

other day out on the lawn. Why should you be so surprised, Frank?"

"Was father there?" asked Frank.

"Yes, indeed, and very proud and pleased he was, as we all were, for it was a noble thing to do. Do you not think so too, Frank?"

"Think what?" said Frank, still with that strange, confused manner upon him.

"Do you not think it was a noble act to save Laddie as he did? You were there. Were you not thankful to get Laddie back?"

Frank stooped and picked up the dog at his feet and held him close in his arms.

"Yes," he said in a low tone, "I was glad Laddie was saved." But his face had suddenly clouded over with an expression of anger and disgust which I could not understand. Was it that he was envious of his brother's bravery and the praise bestowed upon him? We sat silent a moment, Frank with that scowl still on his face.

"Frank," I began presently, "I must say something more to you, dear. Can it be that I see another of those terrible giants walking this way? The giant of Envy and Jealousy? Oh, my little lad, look out for him! Don't let him come. You must not be jealous of your brother."

"It is not that I am jealous of Philip," said Frank, quickly. He raised his head proudly, and there was a sudden kindling in his eyes as he

spoke. "I may sometimes have envied my brother and wished that I could have been born like him, but not to-day." Then he stopped and would say no more, but I saw that he still carried his head high, and the proud look remained in his eyes.

I could not understand it at all, and a little silence rose between us. A cloud had passed across the sun, the birds had suddenly ceased to sing; somehow we had become chilled and saddened.

At last I threw off the feeling of depression and began to speak of Ralph again. Frank promised that he would try to become better acquainted with the sick boy, and to that end would tell him stories, if Ralph were willing to be amused in that manner.

"It will be so hard for me to begin, though, Miss Agatha," he said. "Won't you help me about it a little?"

"I certainly will, my dear. I will tell Ralph about it beforehand and pave the way for you as well as I can. And I believe that when once you have opened your shell and let Ralph know you as you really are, you and he will become good friends. By and by, too, there may come ways in which you can do some little thing for Madge and Gertrude and even for your father. Who knows? Some chance may come quite unexpectedly. And if you do not shut yourself up

any longer, but try to look pleasant and interested in what is going on, perhaps even putting in a word now and then when we are all talking together, as you can if you will only make up your mind to it, why, after awhile they will begin to notice it and think what a change has come over you, and what a kind, good, bright boy you have become all at once. And when you find yourself growing gloomy and lonesome, you must just faithfully try my little recipe for happiness, my dear. Soon you will see that it works well, and that you are feeling like a different boy."

Frank promised gravely that he would try. "Because you want me to, Miss Agatha," he said. Then we rose from our seats at the doorway of the castle and quietly wended our way homeward.

I remembered my promise to prepare Ralph for his unexpected visitor, and next morning called upon that restless young invalid, bright and early. He answered my usual inquiries with a glum countenance. Things were not going right with him at all. He wished to get up, and the doctor was not willing that he should. There was no one at hand just then to amuse him and "not a book within a hundred miles that was fit to read."

Here was my opportunity.

"How would you like to have Frank Sinclair

come in to see you, and do what he can to amuse you?" I asked.

Ralph looked at me in some surprise. "*Frank* Sinclair! Phil, you mean," he answered. "I'd like to have Phil, if he would, but he won't. I haven't seen him in three days. He just stays out of this room as if it was a fiery furnace, and so it is, for that matter," said Ralph, thrashing about on the bed.

"But Frank will come if you will let him," I explained. "And I have learned that he is a great boy for making up stories. He often tells them to Philip, and I believe you would enjoy them, too. Let him come, dear Ralph, and be kind to him. Really, he is a very different boy from what you have believed him to be. I love him dearly, and I wish you to like him too."

Ralph consented, though I feared somewhat reluctantly. "Anything is better than lying here counting those five spots on the ceiling from now till dinner-time," he said, rather ungraciously.

I hastened to find Frank, and with some misgivings left the two boys together. Judge then of my gratification, when at dinner Frank appeared with a flush on his cheek and a bright, triumphant look in his eyes.

"He was as good as he could be, Miss Agatha," he whispered. "I had a jolly good time with him, after all."

Later in the day I visited Ralph again and

heard quite a glowing report from him also of the morning's proceedings.

"He tells the jolliest stories you ever heard, Miss Agatha," he declared. "How any one could ever believe Frank Sinclair was next door to an idiot, I do n't see."

"No one ever did think so but you, Ralph," I answered indignantly.

"Well, anyway, I thought they all thought so. But it is n't true. He 's just as bright as he can be, and he did n't put on that glare of his once. I just liked him for coming in and helping me out as he did, and when I get well I 'm going to make up to him for the way I 've treated him. You see if I do n't. He 's coming to-morrow, and every day till I 'm on my feet again. And, Miss Agatha, I want to tell you how I feel about Aunt Mimy, too. I do n't see how she can be so kind, but she makes the nicest things for me to eat, only I am ashamed to eat 'em, but I have to 'cause they 're so good. I just wish I never had cut off Sinner's pigtails," and the boy hid his face in his pillow.

"Never mind, Ralph dear," I said. "Aunt Mimy has forgotten all that. She asks every day how 'little Redhead' is, for she will call you that, Ralph."

"I do n't care what she calls me," said Ralph from the pillow. "I know I 'll never make fun of her again."

"That's right, my dear," I said heartily, patting the back of his head, which was all I could find to pat.

"Ralph," I whispered to him, after a moment, "do you know that I think you did find your feelings after all, up in the woods that day?"

Ralph was silent a moment. Then he said: "But I don't like 'em, Miss Agatha. They make me feel all sorts of ways." He laughed through his tears.

"Never mind, dear. You will see more and more that they are good things to have, and by and by as you learn, through what you yourself experience, how easy it is to make others happy or unhappy, you will be more anxious to help people instead of hindering them, and so you will grow into that noble, earnest, helpful boy that all your friends must wish you to become."

"I'll try, Miss Agatha," said Ralph, quite humbly.

As may be imagined, it was a happy day, not only for Ralph and his own people, but for the whole household as well, when that impatient young invalid was at length released from his imprisonment and, as he expressed it, "fairly out on his ten toes once more." Everybody was glad to see the little red head glancing in the sunshine, as its owner hurried about from one spot to another, revisiting all the old favorite haunts, in Philip's company, of course, for the

two had at once resumed the old ties of playfellowship and were as much together as ever.

He seemed quite the same careless boy as of old, and yet I fancied there was a little change, that he did not entirely forget the graver thoughts which had come to him in his illness, that he still remembered his promise "to try," which he had made in such good faith. Certain it was that now Aunt Mimy was safe from all his mischievous attacks. In fact it was observed by all of us that she and Ralph were on a footing of the most cordial friendliness once more, the boy running in and out of her kitchen as freely as he liked and was even allowed to play with "Sinner" herself, tossing her and her brother "Saint" about on the various little haycocks piled up on the lawn, along with his own brother Johnny, and making the evening air ring with the shrill laughter of the happy children.

There was plenty of mirth and mischief about Ralph yet, but I could not help believing that it was more kindly in its nature than it had been hitherto, and my heart warmed toward the merry boy, as I watched him flying about from one thing to another, even if it were only "fun" on which his mind was bent from morning till night.

Philip, too, was at his gayest and brightest now that he had his friend back, and it was not strange that soon Frank should seem to lose the

foothold he had lately gained with both of the boys. Not that this was intentional on their part. Certainly Ralph did not mean to neglect the new friend who had lately whiled away many of his dull hours with the stories he called so "jolly." He was still very gentle and kind to Frank, and sometimes I saw the two sitting on the old stump with their arms round each other's shoulders, or perhaps at table they would now and then hold little quiet conversations, showing that they were still good friends. But it was to be expected that as the active boy grew strong again he should seek his own kind, as it were, and he and Philip were natural mates.

Frank seemed silently to acquiesce in the new, or rather the old order of things, and gradually withdrew into his own former habits. He was always ready for a walk or chat with me, to whom he was as confiding and loving as ever, but otherwise he was generally alone, spending much of his time at his "castle" with only his books and Laddie for companions.

Still I could see that the dear boy tried not to be morbid and sad, though it was impossible that he could help feeling lonely. Once or twice I had seen him go up to Madge of his own accord and speak to her in a shy, wistful way that seemed strange between brother and sister. One day he showed her something in a book he

was reading. Madge seemed surprised for the moment at this unusual action on his part and glanced where he pointed, kindly enough, it is true, but with little apparent interest. In a moment she rose, with a careless word or two, and carrying her book with her, went into the house. I saw Frank scowl and could scarcely wonder at the old, sullen look which came to his face. He had done his best and it had amounted to nothing. He had tried to interest his sister and she had not cared.

I could not see how Madge, who seemed such a bright, warm-hearted girl in most things, could be so cruelly indifferent toward her brother. But she was young, and probably did not dream how she had wounded the feelings of the lonely child whom she had never understood.

Again, on another day I witnessed a little scene which touched my heart still more. Mr. Sinclair lay reading in a hammock. Presently I observed Frank at some distance looking at his father with a wistful expression in his eyes. He held something in his hand. I thought I knew what it was, for the day before he had found a remarkably perfect arrow-head with which he had been much pleased. I believed it was this little treasure which he was now trying to find sufficient courage to show to his father, longing and yet fearing to go to him, too anxious to make his first advance toward a better under-

standing to think of retreat, and yet too timid at the thought of being repulsed to venture nearer.

Poor child! My own heart was beating hard when he suddenly compressed his lips and lifted his head, as if saying to himself, "I will," and quickly limped over the ground to his father's side. I wondered what the father would say. Would he seem interested, and keep the boy with him?

Oh, no! When Frank held out his hand saying some few words, Mr. Sinclair raised his eyes from his book and glanced at the boy with a slightly bored expression. Then, as Frank continued to hold out his specimen, he looked at it carelessly a moment and said something which I knew as well as if I had heard it, was a remark like this:

"Yes, very pretty. But run away now. I am busy," at the same time waving him off with his hand.

Oh, the shame, the deep humiliation on the boy's face, the bitter grief of the trembling lips, as he threw the arrow-head as far as he could send it, and suddenly flinging himself about, sped away swiftly toward the mountain path, to be seen no more by any of us till night!

I almost felt persuaded to rush out on the lawn and tell that cruel father for once what I thought of him. I wanted to hold before his

mind's eye the picture of the despairing little face, and make him realize how cruelly he was wounding the little lad whom his wife had left with such tender injunctions in his care. Frank's little overture of friendship was not so much rejected as coldly ignored by the one from whom, above all others, he had the right to expect loving consideration and sympathy. However, before I could have put my impulse into action, John Dale came up and carried Mr. Sinclair off to some distant part of the farm, and I could only strengthen my resolve to seek an early opportunity to talk to the latter concerning what I more and more considered his mistaken training of his two sons.

CHAPTER IX

THE ASCENT OF MOUNT LORRINGTON

THE king of the mountain peaks by which we were surrounded was Mount Lorrington. It was four miles distant, and known as the highest mountain in that region. Almost at its very top was an immense ledge of rock which formed a table-like projection upon which one could stand and view a wondrous scene far, far below. It was said that on a clear day half a dozen counties were plainly visible from it. Nor was the view from its summit the only attraction which this mountain held for tourists, for the whole ascent was rendered interesting by a succession of deep ravines, gloomy rocks and tortuous streams combined with lovely forest roads and trees of immense growth,—altogether forming the wildest and most beautiful scenery in that part of the country.

Every one who came to Glen Elsworth was expected to visit Mount Lorrington at least once during the summer, and the young people had now decided that our time had come.

"We shall never enjoy it more than now, when it is so hot down here. See how cool it looks up

there, almost in the clouds," said Madge, pointing to the mass of purple foliage on Mount Lorrington's top, with the broad, flat rock plainly in view, though softened by the distance to lovely blue-gray tints.

"Let us start bright and early to-morrow morning," she went on; "father, Aunt Margaret, Miss Agatha, everybody. Let us stay all day and come home in the moonlight, for it is full moon now. How lovely that will be!"

"I fear you must leave me out," said I, "for I could never walk so far."

"But we will none of us walk," said Gertrude. "We will go on horseback."

"Oh, jolly!" said Philip, dancing about with delight. "That will be best of all, to go up there on horseback."

"But even so you must leave me behind," I protested. For I knew my own timid nature quite too well to think of trusting myself on a horse's back. "I could never ride in my young days," said I, "and should not dare to begin now."

"Then you shall go up on a mule, Miss Agatha," said Mrs. Dale. "Nothing can be safer or surer-footed than one of the mules about the farm. They spend their lives going up and down the mountain roads, drawing the loads of bark. They could not fall if they tried, so you shall go on a mule, for we could not think of leaving you behind."

All the young people laughed at the idea of my going on the mule, but I did not care for the look of the thing if it were only safe, and when John Dale and Mr. Sinclair, who both wished to walk, promised to march in turn at the head of my gallant steed I gladly consented to form one of the party, for I was as anxious as anybody to view the wonders of Mount Lorrington.

As it turned out, this was the wisest arrangement we could have made, for there were not horses enough to go around, and Ralph and Philip were obliged, after all, to forego the glory of making the ascent on horseback, and had likewise to make up their minds to a humble mule. They could not even have the whole of that, but must take their turns at sitting perched upon the animal's back in front of two large hampers containing our dinner.

This did not suit our young gentlemen very well, nor did they submit to their fate without a pout or two, but finally agreed to make the best of it. I saw them a little later in close conversation with John Dale about something which seemed to delight them very much, judging from the manner in which they were rolling over on the grass and behaving like crazy boys. I wondered what it could be, for John Dale was usually a very sedate young man and not given to much merrymaking, with the children, at all events, but I soon forgot it, for my mind was upon

poor Frank; my own pleasure in the trip being sadly marred by the thought that he was not to make one of the party. No one had suggested his going, and as there would be no horse or even mule for him, and he could not walk, it seemed inevitable that he must remain at home. I feared he might feel wounded at being so completely left out of everybody's thoughts, but if he was, he was too proud to show it. Indeed, a little later in the day when I had a chance to speak to him about the matter, he assured me that he would rather remain quietly at home reading one of his books. He had just started on the journey with "Alice in Wonderland," and knew he should like that far better than to journey with us to the top of Mount Lorrington. So he said, trying to speak bravely and cheerfully, but I fancied there was a hurt look in his eyes, and though I said little, I resolved that the day should come when Frank should have his "good times" with the best of them, if I could bring it about.

We were all up bright and early next morning, and by seven o'clock had eaten our breakfast and were gathered on the porch. Everybody was chattering, and the young people, especially, were asking all sorts of questions and paying no attention whatever to the answers. Even Mrs. Todd and her sisters were going, venturing to leave Johnny, who had faithfully promised to be good

and to stay contentedly with Lorena, the black chambermaid, in consideration of the agreement entered into by each and every one of us to give him "sumpin' nice" upon our return. Mrs. Archer actually unbent so far as to say that there was something pretty in her trunk for him, and Mr. Sinclair, also, when Johnny looked to him for his share in the general contribution, boldly promised to produce something from his trunk, too, or his pocket, or somewhere. The fact was that we were all Johnny's slaves and only too thankful to be allowed to bear off his mamma and aunties upon such easy terms.

By half-past seven we were mounted, all the other women on horseback and I on my humble mule. Ralph brought up the rear on the other mule, sitting before the two hampers which were firmly strapped to the animal's back and which Aunt Mimy, with much jabbering and expostulation, warned "little Redhead" to "min' an' look out fer."

Good, fat old Aunt Mimy! Nobody knew how late she had sat up the night before, roasting the chickens and baking the delicious biscuits, pies and cakes which she had felt obliged to prepare, even upon such short notice, and which we presently expected to devour far, far up the northern mountain whose purple outline stood out sharp and clear against the soft morning sky. She stood

in her kitchen door now, calling out some merry parting word, her hands on her hips, her turban all askew, her face one broad grin. By her side was Lorena holding up Johnny for a last good-bye. Round them were grouped all the woolly heads, great and small, belonging to the farm. Only Frank was absent.

"Good luck! good luck!" they shouted, and Aunt Mimy took off her slipper and flung it after us with all her strength, quite as if we had been a bridal party setting forth from the paternal door. It landed squarely on Mr. Sinclair's back and was heavy enough to have caused some pain. If it did, he did not mind, but turned around and playfully shook his cane at Aunt Mimy and with a merry nod passed on, for he, too, seemed infected with the spirit of jollity which was abroad among us that morning.

We passed through some bars and across a pasture, then on to an old bark road which led through woods where I had never been before. Just as the road began to ascend the hill and the trees and bushes grew more dense, I chanced to glance aside, and there, shielded among the leaves, was Frank.

He sat quietly on an old log, gazing at us in a way which sent a pain through my heart. There was no help for it, but all day the sad little face kept rising before me, and bringing the tears to my eyes.

On and on we went, picking our way over the rough road which was barely wide enough in places to allow us to go in single file. Every now and then we stopped to examine some rare plant or bit of moss, or to exclaim with delight as a view more beautiful than the last met our eyes. Gradually the ascent became more steep and the forest more dense, until finally we were surrounded by trees of a uniform height and of immense growth.

The old bark road wound in and out among the rocks and rough underbrush, over brooks and marshy places, but always ascending higher and higher up the mountainside, until at length, after half an hour's climbing, we came to the mouth of a deep ravine, through which flowed a remarkably clear stream. Steep, dark walls now rose upon both sides, and our road became still more narrow, twisting among the rocks, and crossing and recrossing the little brook.

After we had gone on for half a mile through this narrow gorge, we all dismounted and sat down to rest and to gaze at our strange surroundings, grand and even terrible in their sublimity. Great rocky walls closed about us, and towered several hundred feet above our heads. In every little crevice grew ferns and small shrubs. Even trees had found a root-hold and hung out over the ravine at a dizzy height.

I thought of the words of Scott:

"The primrose pale and violet flower
Found in each clift a narrow bower;
* * * * *
"And, higher yet, the pine-tree hung
His shattered trunk, and frequent flung,
Where seemed the cliffs to meet on high,
His boughs athwart the narrowed sky."

As we sat there a feeling of awe came over us. Even the voices of the children were hushed. There was no wind. A deep silence, save for the faint noise of the brook at our feet, brooded over everything. Looking back, we could see the narrow defile shut in by lofty walls of dark, jagged rocks, so high that only a gloomy twilight reached the pathway over which we had come.

Great scars in the sides of the cliffs showed where masses of stone had been detached by the frosts of winter and had fallen into the depths below. Who could tell which of the others might even now be trembling to their fall! It was a relief when Madge suddenly started up, saying:

"Oh, let us go! It is grand! It is beautiful, and all that, but oh, it is too dreadful!"

In silence we mounted and again moved onward. Soon the space between the walls began to widen, the rocks became lower, and in another quarter of an hour we had emerged from the gloomy, frowning chasm, and once more felt the warmth and brightness of the sunlight about us.

Ascending the mountain

"What about going home by moonlight now, Miss Madge," said John Dale, slyly. "Shall we go through the gorge to-night?"

"Oh, never!" exclaimed Madge, who looked pale and half frightened yet.

"No, indeed," said Mr. Sinclair. "No moon could guide our steps through that dark abyss. We must get quickly to the summit and go home before sunset."

"There is another way home, not quite so interesting but much shorter," said John. "We need not go through the gorge again if we do not wish to."

We all agreed that though it was wonderful in its wild, rugged grandeur, and we were glad to have seen it, we would by all means choose the other road for our return.

We toiled merrily on for half an hour or so, until we reached a spot where a narrow bridle-path led from the road. Gertrude and Madge, who were in advance, passed by without heeding this, urging their horses to a brisker trot over the level stretch which lay before them. The rest of the party were following when John Dale, who walked by my mule's head, suddenly called out:

"Hello, Gertrude, come back. Where are you going?"

Gertrude turned her horse and looked at her brother in surprise. "Up to the top, of course,"

she said. "This is the way we always go, is n't it?"

"Yes, but do n't let us go that way to-day. Come up this path. It will take us to the top sooner than the other road. I found that out this spring."

"But it is not nearly so good a road," said his mother, "and the woods are so beautiful along the other way. I think we had better keep to that."

John still insisted that the new route was the better, and Philip and Ralph put in their word, too, and declared with the greatest eagerness that it was the quickest road, and the best, and "a thousand times the shadiest."

"Why, how can you possibly know," said Philip's father, "when you have never been there?"

"No, but we know it is," said the boys, looking a little confused, for some unexplained reason. Philip, who was now on the mule, suddenly started up that sedate animal, and led the way up the hill for a short way, and Ralph danced along at his side, calling to everybody to come on, while John Dale, too, turned my mule in the direction he wanted him to take, and with a merry command to the rest of the party, said:

"Yes, come on. I'm going to have my way for once. You won't be sorry. This path leads out to another road in a few moments, as good as this, and there 's a beautiful little grove half a

mile farther up, just the place for us to eat our dinner. Come on," he shouted.

Gertrude, who knew that the old road was very lovely, was loath to turn about, and Mrs. Dale also looked somewhat reluctant to venture up on a new and untried way, but as John and the boys seemed to have set their hearts upon it, they both turned their horses' heads and followed our lead, John and I now heading the cavalcade and pushing through the bushes and low-growing branches, while Philip and the others came after us in single file.

For my own part, I did not care which way we went if only we could soon come to that beautiful grove, or to some other comfortable spot where I could dismount and rest for even the briefest time. In a little while, however, we did pass through the thick woods out to a well-worn road, as John had said, and a few more rods carried us on to the grove.

This was a broad table-land set about with tall chestnut-trees. There was scarcely any underbrush, and the ground was comparatively smooth and covered with a thick growth of grass, refreshing for our eyes to rest upon after the long stretch of rough road we had just passed over. There were a number of old logs lying about, and here and there stood huge blocks of wood cut long ago by some forgotten woodman, and left to whiten in the sun.

It was an ideal dining-room, and, apparently, others besides ourselves had found it so, for under four great trees whose branches made a shady canopy, some one had placed a broad board across two huge stumps, and there even now were the tokens of recent visitors, in a tin cup and two glasses left upon this rudely constructed table.

We were all ready for dinner, though it was early yet; and, while Mrs. Dale and Gertrude bustled about and spread the table in picnic fashion, taking out, one after another, the good things which Aunt Mimy had provided, the others sat about at ease. Mr. Sinclair and John Dale stretched themselves at full length on the grass. Philip and Ralph retired to the edge of the bushes, where they were holding an absorbing confab about something; and Madge perched herself on the top of a tree stump, from which she looked down upon us all, and joined merrily in whatever conversation was flying about.

When Mrs. Dale and Gertrude had the board, literally the board, nicely spread with a bountiful dinner, they made coffee over a little fire which Philip and Ralph tended with the greatest care, and compounded a huge pitcher of lemonade to which Madge had lent a helping hand.

I cannot stop to dwell on the details of our dinner, though I would like to do so, for it was a good one, over which we lingered long, praising Aunt Mimy in a way which, if she could only

have heard us, would have made her fat cheeks puff out and her twinkling eyes and firm white teeth shine with delight. Even after we could eat no more, we still sat on, talking of a thousand things, while Mrs. Dale and Aunt Jessie cleared away the dishes. Suddenly we missed the boys. They had been with us shortly before, but now they were nowhere to be seen.

"Where can they be?" said Mrs. Todd, anxiously, and Mrs. Archer looked somewhat alarmed when Mr. Sinclair called aloud and received no answer but the echo of his own voice.

"Oh, they are all right," said John Dale quickly. "I saw them when they went off. They are just up the hill there a little way." Then he asked Madge and Gertrude to go with him to hunt them up, as they were willing enough to do, for it was a pretty, winding path through beautiful woods to which he led the way.

Meanwhile we sat on, calmly enjoying our pleasant grove and comfortable seats, while we waited for the young people's return.

Presently down the path rushed Madge, her long braids streaming behind her, her round, rosy face beaming with pleasure and excitement, her feet fairly flying over the loose stones in her haste to get to us. Gertrude followed after her not one whit less excited than she, and John

brought up the rear, more sedately, it is true, but looking pleased and eager nevertheless.

"Oh," cried Madge, in short, quick breaths, "get up, every one of you, and come with us. We have found a cave, a wonderful cave with real little people living in it. Come on, quick!"

CHAPTER X

THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE MOUNTAIN

When Madge came rushing down the mountain path in such headlong fashion, with her cheeks flushed and her eyes shining with excitement, we all looked at her and at each other in astonishment. What did the child mean? She might indeed have found a cave, but was it likely that there were real people who lived in it in this lonely mountain far away from all human kind?

"Oh, come, do hurry!" said she, rushing into our midst and seizing her father's hand. "Come, they are waiting up there for us!"

"My daughter," said Mr. Sinclair, "take breath and tell us what you have found, and all about it."

Thus admonished, Madge obediently drew a long breath, and standing before her father, endeavored to quiet herself and enter upon her story with more composure.

"I'll tell you as fast as I can," she said, "for they want us to come up there."

"Who want us to come?" asked her father.

"The two Little Sisters"——

"The little sisters?"

"Yes, the Little Sisters of the Mountain. That's what they call themselves. But I'll begin at the beginning. You know Mr. Dale asked Gertrude and me to go up there," pointing to the path, "to hunt for the boys. So after we had gone a little way we came to a place where the path ran right up against a steep, rocky wall of the mountain, something like that dreadful gorge we came through this morning, and Mr. Dale, who was going ahead, happened to see an opening in the rocks, with vines and bushes growing all about it. He pushed his stick in there and found a wide space behind the leaves. He wanted to go in and see what was there, but we didn't like to have him, for fear there might be bears, or wildcats, or something, in there. But he would do it, and pretty soon he came out again and said it was a real cave, with a nice room in it all hollowed out of the rocks. It looked as if it had been lately swept, and was as clean as if somebody lived there, though he didn't find any one. He said it was perfectly safe for us to go in, so, after all, we thought we'd venture, and we all three went in together.

"It's a curious place, as you will say when you see it. There are stone walls all around it and a stone roof, and the light comes in through a great crack in the rocks over the entrance. We walked all about it, and in one corner we

found another wide crack in the wall. We looked through it, and there was a second chamber almost as large as the one we were in, only it was n't light like that. And what do you think we found there?" asked Madge, her eyes wide with excitement. "It had an old table in it like any common kitchen table, and on the table was a lighted candle, for it would have been dark in there without it, and some old tin plates and a cup or two. There were two big stumps on the floor, just like the one you 're on, father, and on these stumps sat two of the queerest looking old women you ever saw in all your lives. They were the tiniest old women, real little dwarfs, and their heads and hands shook as if they were a hundred years old."

"And they were bundled up in old shawls and pieces of blankets," put in Gertrude, "and had their faces bound up in rags and old, faded silk handkerchiefs, because the cave was so damp it gave them earache and toothache, they said."

"Yes," continued Madge, "and one of them was darning an old stocking, and the other seemed to be trying to knit, though her hands shook so, I do n't see how she could manage that. Gertrude and I wanted to go back when we saw them, for we felt a little afraid, but Mr. Dale went up and spoke to them, and they got off their stools and made the funniest little bows, and offered him their seats, and seemed delighted

to see him. Then they began to talk, and looked at us, and he beckoned to us to come up too. So we all talked together, and they told us about themselves, and it 's the strangest thing you ever heard. They say they have been in the mountain for fifty years"——

"Now, Madge, what are you trying to make us believe?" said her father. "You are making this up, and trying to play some silly joke on us."

"No, indeed!" said Madge, indignantly. "It is every word of it true."

"There might easily enough be a cave," said Mr. Sinclair. "I should think there might be any number of caves in these mountains, but do you truly say you have seen two little dwarf women up there who have lived in that cave for fifty years?" Here he looked at John Dale.

"That 's certainly what they told us," said John. "I know it sounds queer, but there they are, and you can see them for yourself in fifteen minutes, if you will walk up that path."

"Yes, and they tell fortunes," said Gertrude, excitedly. "They said they would tell all our fortunes if you would only come up, and we told them we would bring you."

"Now, my dear girls, I hope you do n't believe that nonsense. You are too sensible to believe in fortune-telling," expostulated Mr. Sinclair.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Gertrude, doubtfully.

"Still, it 's very strange how they knew so much about us. They knew we had two men in our party, and they said there were five ladies sitting down in the grove, waiting for us, and how could they tell that?"

"Why, they saw us, of course," said Mr. Sinclair. "That is simple enough."

"I do n't think so," said Gertrude, reflectively. "One of them was sewing and the other was knitting, and they looked as if they had n't stirred off of their stools for hours."

"Besides," said Madge, triumphantly, "why did they tell me to go and bring my father? How did they know one of the men was my father?"

"That was a safe enough guess," replied Mr. Sinclair, "if they really saw us."

"And why did they tell Mr. Dale that he never would get the wish he made at dinner, when he broke the wish-bone with me, unless he brought his mother and the other ladies to have their fortunes told?" asked Madge.

"Did they actually say that?" asked Mr. Sinclair, looking incredulously at John.

"Yes, indeed," answered John. "Everything happened as the girls have said, though I own it looks queer. I advise you all to come up and see the old crones for yourselves. Perhaps we can solve the mystery in some way."

"Well," said Mr. Sinclair, getting up, "per-

haps we might as well go. Not that any human being could make me believe in such nonsense. And if I thought any one could peer into my future or into that of my children, I would be the last one to let them do so. Still, I own I feel a little curious."

"Well, then," said Madge, seizing her father's hand again, "do come. And come, everybody. It 's only a little way up the hill."

Of course the rest of us were too wise to believe in the fortune-telling nonsense, but it seemed that there were really two strange old women in a cave a little way up the mountain, for these young people were evidently very much in earnest about it. So as we were not without our own share of curiosity, we prepared to follow Mr. Sinclair and the eager guides as quickly as possible.

Before we had gone more than a few steps, however, the errand upon which the young people had started an hour before, occurred to our minds, and somebody said:

"What about Philip and Ralph? Did you see anything of them?"

"Oh, we never once thought of them," said Madge, stopping short in the path. "We were so taken up with the cave we forgot all about the boys."

"But I thought of them," said John Dale, "and heard them, too. They are just up in the

mountain a little way. I heard their voices close at hand. They are all right, and having a good time up there by themselves. Do n't worry about the boys," he added carelessly.

"They 'd like to see the little old women, too," said his mother. "We had better call them."

"Oh, I would n't stop now," said John hastily. "I 'll go up where they are presently. Or perhaps they 'll see us when we get to the cave."

We walked on through the pleasant woods till we came to the rocky mountainside, of which Madge had told us, and there we found the opening of the cave half concealed by vines and bushes as she had said. It was high enough for us to pass within quite easily, though Mr. Sinclair and John and even Mrs. Archer were obliged to stoop a little.

We looked about the first chamber, though there was not much to see except the damp stone walls and the cleanly swept floor, and then we peeped through the wide crack in the opposite wall into the next room.

Yes, it was all as the girls had said. There, indeed, sat two small old women, so huddled together over their table, and so bundled up in their blankets and shawls, that, in the dim light of the single candle, we could scarcely have told that they were human beings at all if we had come upon them without any previous preparation.

When they heard us at the entrance of their chamber, they immediately arose from their seats and began a series of jerky little bows, until John Dale, who at once assumed the leadership of our little party, helped us through the narrow passage and escorted us up to the strange little women, making some polite introductory remark to them as he did so.

They were indeed very singular looking people, though in fact very little could be seen of them, for they were so enveloped in their unusual amount of clothing that only a portion of their faces and their hands was visible. They wore old, faded gingham frocks, which lay on the floor and concealed their feet. Closely wrapped and pinned about them were the dusty, torn old shawls and blankets of which the girls had spoken. Their skin was brown as if they might have been Indians or gypsies, but their eyes, strange to say, were quite unlike the eyes of those races, those of one sister being large and dark blue, while the other had a pair of light gray, rather shrewd-looking eyes which peered out with a decided twinkle through the thick gray locks of hair which fell about their owner's forehead and cheeks.

This little sister had evidently been sewing upon an old piece of cloth, though I could not imagine what kind of a garment it could be. The other held the stocking she was knitting in

her hand. They were much bent in form, and their heads and hands trembled with an unsteady motion, but their skin, at least so much of it as we could see, was not as wrinkled as one would expect in people so old as they claimed to be.

They could not offer us seats, as there were only the two old stumps in the room, but they stood before us bowing politely, smiling and waving their hands, while John Dale proceeded to open a conversation.

"Here we are, with the rest of our party," said he, "and we're all anxious to hear more of your strange story. Won't you tell the others what you told us a while ago?"

With that, the old woman with the blue eyes immediately started on her story in a high, piping voice, the words tripping from her tongue as rapidly and smoothly as if they had been a lesson she had learned by heart, or as if she had spoken them so many times that now they came mechanically without any effort on her part.

"We are the Little Sisters of the Mountain," she said, "and we have lived here through wind and storm, through rain and shine, through winter's snow and summer's heat for fifty years. We were young maidens when first we came, with cheeks as fair and eyes as bright as those," pointing to the two girls, who stood near gazing with the greatest eagerness upon the strange

little speaker, "and now see what we are. Time, and the winds and storms of the mountain have done their work upon us. They have bent our forms and silvered our heads; they have taken from us the light feet with which we ran hither and thither up and down the mountain paths, and have left us instead the halting step of palsied age." Here the old woman straightened herself up for the moment. "But they have never touched our minds, nor have they stolen from us one jot of the lore we gained in our youth, that lore by which we tell the secrets of the past and present, that lore which teaches us to read in the lines of a man's hand all the thoughts and actions which have ruled his life and—and"——

Here the old woman suddenly halted and took a long breath, whether because she was tired or had forgotten what words of her speech came next, I could not tell. It almost seemed as if it must be the latter, because for a moment she seemed confused, and I thought her sister moved uneasily. She was starting off again, however, when John Dale said somewhat hastily:

"Tell us about how you first came here, Little Sister."

"Yes," she said. "It was when we were very young. We were with our tribe and were camped in some woods near a fine house far, far from here. One day a beautiful little child

came out of that house and wandered into the woods, and some of the tribe stole it and brought it into the camp. They said they would keep it and sell its rich clothing and let it grow up as one of us, and they made everything ready to tear up the camp and steal away at once. But I and my sister here, we could not bear that this thing should be done, because we thought that we ourselves had once been stolen, too, and that we did not belong to the gypsies in the beginning any more than the little child did, and that made us sorry for it. And we thought of its people, too. So when we believed that no one saw us, we took it in its sleep and ran with it swiftly through the woods till we reached its father's door. Then we started to return, but the gypsies had seen us, and they punished us—oh, how they punished us! I cannot tell you about that. But when we thought we had borne all they meant us to bear, they brought us into this mountain, where we had often been before, and this time they left us here. They bound us with terrible oaths that we would not leave the mountain until they should say we might. That time has never come, and now we think it never will.

"Every two or three years they come here to us and bring us clothes to wear and things to eat. But they bind us again with the dreadful oaths to stay till they come the next time.

So here we have lived for fifty years, and here we shall live till we die. But now we do not mind, for we have grown to love our lonely mountain. It is like father and mother and sister and brother, all in one, to us now. But most of all we like to think of it as a great protecting brother, and so we call ourselves the Little Sisters of the Mountain."

"But how is it about your fortune-telling?" asked John.

"Oh, yes," said the little sister. "They force us to get money for them through our knowledge of the secrets of the past and future. Years ago, when we were young, they taught us this knowledge, and now we are obliged to use it when strangers come here to our mountain haunts. If we have no money for our tribe when they come, they beat us. They will soon come to us now, and we have no money this year, for until to-day no strangers have come this way. So please, sweet ladies and kind gentlemen," said the old woman, suddenly becoming more businesslike, "may we tell your fortunes? There is such a beautiful fortune coming to that young lady. I can see it in her face, if she will only let me have her hand to guide me a little." She hobbled up to Gertrude, and peered into her face.

"Wait a bit," said Mr. Sinclair, with a rather quizzical look. "Do n't be so fast. How are we to know that you can peer into the future until

we have more than your word for it? Better tell us something of the past first; then we can put more faith in what you say of the future."

"Very well," said the old woman, nodding her head cheerfully. "Ask what you please. I am ready."

"Well, let me see," said Mr. Sinclair. "How many sisters has this girl?" drawing Madge toward him.

"No sisters at all," said the old woman, tossing her head scornfully, "but twin brothers."

"Indeed," said Mr. Sinclair, looking slightly puzzled. "What is her father's occupation?"

"A lawyer, of course. What silly questions," said the little sister contemptuously, while the other sister gave a chuckle quickly suppressed.

"What is this girl's name?"

"Margaret. She is named for that lady standing next to you."

"Well, I must say I think this is very strange, do n't you, brother?" asked Mrs. Archer.

"A little strange," answered Mr. Sinclair, "but let us go on. Tell me where I live."

"You live in a big, square brick house, ten miles from a great city. It has a little lake near it, and a green lawn round it."

"Is that true?" I asked.

Mr. Sinclair nodded, while Mrs. Archer exclaimed, "Most singular, I must say!"

"Who is this lady?" asked Mr. Sinclair, pointing to Mrs. Todd.

Here the old woman, drawing a long breath, turned to her sister. "Sister," she said petulantly, "why do n't you say something? You can tell all this silly stuff as well as I can. I 'm tired."

"Oh, yes," said the little gray-eyed sister, speaking for the first time. "I know it all well enough."

I noticed that she finished her sentence in a high voice like her sister's, but it seemed to me she had begun in a deeper key.

"Oh, yes," she said. "She is a lady who has lived in lots of places, and been on the ocean a good many times. Her husband is there now."

"True enough," said Mrs. Todd, looking around her in amazement.

"And one of her boys broke his arm a little while ago, or perhaps it was his leg," the little sister continued, as if not wishing to be too positive.

"Well, I think it is very queer," whispered Madge. "I 'm half afraid to have them tell my fortune now; they know too much. Perhaps what they say would really come true."

"But that 's what you wish, is n't it?" said John.

"Not if they should tell me anything bad," said Madge, dubiously.

"Oh, but I don't believe they 'd do that," said John.

"No, indeed," said one of the sisters; "it is a beautiful fortune that I see in the lady's face," and she held out her hand to take Madge's.

"Oh, wait a moment," said Mr. Sinclair. "I have another question or two to ask. What do you do here for food? You say your tribe bring you things to eat sometimes. But that can't last long. What do you do when that is gone?"

"Why, we"—— The blue-eyed sister, who had begun to speak, hesitated a moment.

"Probably they catch fish and small game, and live on berries and wild fruits," said John Dale, looking at the little sister rather fixedly.

"Yes, we do," she said. "We live on things we find up here, of course; berries and nuts and —and"——

"And we catch fish, and shoot squirrels with sling-shots just as boys do," put in the gray-eyed sister eagerly.

Mr. Sinclair gave her a sharp glance, but made no comment on what she said. He went on with his questioning.

"But what do you do for fires in winter? If you are cold here on such a day as this, how can you get along in winter?"

"Why—we—we—oh, well, we have other homes in the mountain besides this," said the first sister, moving about and looking uncomfortable.

"Where are they? Can you build fires in them?"

"Yes," said the sister, evidently embarrassed. "We don't like so many questions," she said. "It is about you that we wish to speak, not ourselves. So, pretty lady, now may I tell your fortune?"

She put out her hand again directly in the light of the candle. I saw Mr. Sinclair quickly bend over it a moment. Then he gave another sharp glance at the second little sister's face, and suddenly burst into a hearty "Ha! ha! ha!"

"Mrs. Todd," he said, "I wish you would examine that little sister's hair carefully, and see if there isn't one lock there among all those gray ones that looks familiar to you. As for me, I know I've seen the scar on this hand a hundred times before."

Here he drew the blue-eyed sister to him, while the other little old woman, looking completely thunderstruck for the moment, suddenly put her hand to her head, and then, tearing off her wrappings and flinging an old gray wig on the floor, shouted:

"Oh, plague on my old red hair! It's forever getting me into trouble!"

And there stood Ralph revealed to our astonished gaze, while Philip, struggling in his father's arms, scarcely knowing whether to laugh

or to be indignant, was trying to keep his face concealed.

But his father kept on laughing and tugging at the old clothes in which the boy was wrapped, and finally out of the crumpled mass stepped a very rueful and much tumbled Philip.

As for Ralph, he had promptly shaken himself clear of his encumbrances, and now gave a merry shout as he said, "Well, it 's a burning shame we got found out, but I 'm glad to be out of these old carpet rags, anyhow."

As for me, I was as much astonished at the last two minutes' part of the performance as at any previous portion of it, for though I had felt from the time when Mr. Sinclair had propounded his first questions regarding our party, that they were being answered by some one who must know something about us, I had never for a moment suspected Philip and Ralph of being the perpetrators of the joke. I had thought of them as somewhere above us in the mountain. Certainly John Dale had said so. But now that I came to think of it, he had only said what was true. They *were* up in the mountain, near at hand, and he *had* heard their voices when he and the girls had been in the cave. I remembered, too, how I had thought it almost seemed as if he were trying to prompt the Little Sisters in their answers. One other, at least, had noticed this also.

"Of course I knew from the first that some one was trying to play pranks on us," said Mr. Sinclair, "but I own that I did not think of its being the boys till I heard you trying to help them make up their story."

"Well, it's too bad," said John, laughing. "We had meant to fool the girls completely, and the rest of you, too. But neither the boys nor I expected to be cross-examined by a sharp lawyer, and we 'd quite overlooked such little details as eating and fires and so on."

"After all, it was n't that alone that told me," said Mr. Sinclair. "Just as Ralph spoke about shooting the squirrels, he put his hand suddenly to his head and disarranged that gray wig, and I immediately discovered the end of a lock whose hue I thought I recognized."

"Plague on it," said Ralph again, indignantly, "I wish I 'd been born without a hair on my head!"

"You did not have much, my dear, when you were born," said his mother.

"Then I wish I 'd never had one since," he said in such a disgusted tone that the walls of the cave quite resounded with our mirth.

"But how did such a thing come into your heads, boys?" asked one of the girls. "I 'm so glad we did n't let you tell our fortunes. We 'd never have heard the last of it. But how did you come to think of it?"

"Well, I suppose I am at the bottom of it," said John Dale. "I was up here this spring with some of the bark-men, and we came across this cave. It was evidently in use by somebody, for the table was in it just as you see it now. It occurred to me then that it would be a good joke to play on Gertrude and some cousins of ours, to pretend to find it some time when they should be with me. So I said nothing about it. When we decided yesterday to come up here I thought it would be a good time to have the joke come off. I told the boys about it and found they were ready for it."

"Ready for it!" exclaimed Philip. "We went into it hammer and tongs, you mean."

"We did n't quite know how to dress the boys up," said John. "We thought we 'd have to make old women of them, because their voices would n't be right for old men. So we took Aunt Mimy and Lorena into our confidence, and they produced the old rags. Aunt Mimy lent the knitting-work and the sewing. The old wig is one I have had for years."

"I thought that old brass thimble on Philip's thumb (a pretty place to wear it!) looked like the one Aunt Mimy 's had ever since I can remember," said Gertrude.

"And the candle, she lent us that," said Philip. "We were in agony for fear it would burn out before we could get through with you, you were

so long coming. Why did n't you hurry ?" he said to John, reproachfully. "We got ourselves all stained up with the walnut bark, and sat here bundled up in our old clothes for hours before you came."

"Oh, not so long as that," said John, laughing. "Take off a few minutes. I did try to hurry them all I could, but I thought myself they 'd never start. And then they wanted me to stop and hunt you up."

"Well, well! 'All 's well that ends well,'" said Mr. Sinclair.

"But it has n't ended well," said Philip, kicking the table leg. "It 's ended up all in a botch, and we meant to have such fun out of it."

"And so you have; it 's been a splendid joke," said Madge kindly. "And if father had n't asked so many questions we never would have known but that you really were the Little Sisters of the Mountain, for it was too dark to see you very well."

"Yes, it was well conceived and carried out, and quite a pretty story, too," said Mr. Sinclair, giving an affectionate pat to Philip's shoulder.

"Yes, was n't it ?" said Ralph, eagerly. "Frank made up our story for us."

"Frank! Frank who ?" asked Mr. Sinclair, in surprise.

"Why, Frank Sinclair, your son, of course. You know what splendid stories he makes up," said Ralph.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Sinclair, opening his eyes wide. "No, I did not know it, certainly."

"That's queer!" said Ralph, looking surprised in his turn. "Well, he does, all the same, just the jolliest stories. And last night, instead of going to bed, all three of us got together in Phil's room, and Frank wrote it off as fast as he could. Then Philip went to work and learned it, but he got so sleepy he had to give it up before he had it perfect. But I think he did pretty well, considering," said Ralph.

"So he did. He did it beautifully," said Philip's aunt, and so said we all. But I noticed that Mr. Sinclair's face wore a puzzled expression. Was he trying to solve the problem of how the child whom he had been led to consider as stunted in mind no less than in body, was yet so far the superior of his mates that he was called upon not only to invent their little romances for them as occasion might arise, but had even attained the reputation among them of being the "jolliest story-teller that ever was"?

As he stood silent with the lines of perplexity on his forehead, while the others were chattering and laughing about him, I hoped it might prove a problem which he would work at long and seriously, and which he would never give up till the right answer had been found, till he should learn to know his son as he really was, and to make ready that place in his heart which the lov-

ing boy had so ardently longed and waited for through all his childhood.

However, the time was not yet come. Some one arrested Mr. Sinclair's attention, and the thought of Frank was cast aside. But I hoped it would return, and, somehow, in my heart there was a happier feeling about my little friend, the conviction being strong that the father's heart would yet open wide to the lonely, motherless and almost friendless child.

"Come, come!" said Mr. Sinclair breaking in upon these thoughts of mine. He looked at his watch in the dim light of the candle. "Come, we must hurry. Here it is past two, and we are not yet at the top of our mountain."

CHAPTER XI

AN ADVENTURE WITH A SNAKE

NEXT morning when I awoke, my first thought was of Frank. His sad face as I had last seen it rose before me again, and I almost dreaded to meet him at the breakfast-table, for fear the sorrowful look might still be there, or even, perhaps, the old sullen frown which sometimes, though very rarely now, crept over his brow.

But my fears were groundless. He met me with a cheery smile, and seemed more bright and happy than usual, as he and Ralph, sitting side by side, carried on a lively conversation quite by themselves.

He had evidently made up his mind to "be good," and take his old friend Agatha's advice, —to make himself happy in trying to make others happy,—for he was eagerly saying something in a low tone to Ralph, at which Ralph laughed with the merriest enjoyment, though in a stifled sort of fashion, that he might not disturb the others. I did not know what it was, some little joke among themselves, of course, but it made me glad, for it showed how my dear little friend was trying to rise above the morbid, self-

conscious, hateful state of feeling which had borne him down so long, and was actually planting his feet with a firm hold upon the lower rounds of that ladder which was to lead him, I hoped, to a noble, helpful and loving youth and manhood.

Two or three times in the course of the breakfast I saw his father gazing at him with a puzzled expression in his eyes. My heart gave a sudden, exultant leap as I perceived it. Had he begun at last to think of his son? to study him? to wonder what that bright, eager smile on the boy's face could mean? to question whether he were really the heavy, slow-witted dullard he had always believed? As he sat with a keen, searching look in his eyes as they dwelt upon the boy, was he saying to himself, "Is this Frank? my son! the one for whom I have always had to blush! What does that bright look mean?"

And then I fancied him going on with his questioning. "What did they mean yesterday by the boy's making up stories?" Oh, it gave me a strange little thrill of triumph as I sat watching the grave man's earnest eyes fixed full on Frank's smiling face—all unconscious of the steady gaze upon it. At last, I thought, the clouds are breaking, and Frank will yet find his way to his father's heart.

That afternoon Frank and I departed from our usual custom of walking in the mountains, and

betook ourselves instead to one end of the lawn, where a hammock and some rustic seats had been placed in a cool spot, a little way within the woods. Presently, as we sat talking together, along came Philip, Ralph and Henry, the waiter-boy, carrying Johnny in his arms. Henry began to practise those "spinning wheels" in which he was so proficient. He proceeded to instruct the two boys in all the mysteries of his art, and "buzzed" away so furiously that Johnny clapped his fat hands and fairly screamed with delight.

After a little time Ralph saw his mother beckon to him from the house and ran off to see what she wanted, but the others stayed on, Philip and Henry still busily constructing their wheels, and Johnny looking on and applauding vigorously.

At length the child grew tired of watching them and wandered a few steps within the wood, seating himself on the ground at a little distance from where the other boys were playing and also quite near to Frank and me, plainly in view of us all. Presently, as he sat there, he gave a piercing scream and then remained silent. Looking up, we saw his eyes fixed immovably on something directly in front of him. In that very second, as we gazed in startled amazement, we heard the ominous rattle of a snake,—who that has ever heard the sound can fail to recog-

nize it?—and next we saw its head lifted, its cruel eyes fixed upon poor Johnny, as it suddenly coiled itself to spring at the child, paralyzed with fear.

With a wild scream Philip and Henry flew from the spot, rushing with all their speed across the lawn. But in that same moment the boy at my side rose from his seat. He had with him a strong stick which he often used as a cane, and making two wild leaps to where Johnny sat, poised himself on his good foot, and brought the stick down—thank God!—upon the snake's head just at the right moment. How he ever flew over the ground in time I cannot tell, but he did, and by his presence of mind saved Johnny.

Then he picked up the trembling child, and limping over to me, placed him in my lap. I kissed and comforted the baby as well as I could, thankful that no harm had come to the precious little life, thinking, too, all the time, what happiness would be mine when I should tell his fond mother how her son had been saved and by whom. Then I turned to my brave boy, Frank, and holding him close, told him something of what was in my heart for him because he had so nobly flown to Johnny's rescue.

For the child had been in the gravest danger. The snake was one of great size, as Frank found presently, when, like any eager boy, he went

back to look at it, with Johnny, now quite recovered from his fright, trotting behind him.

"It's a whopper, Miss Agatha," he called back to me, "with eight rattles and a button on it."

I learned afterward that it had been many years since a rattlesnake had been found so near the house. A few were caught from time to time in the rocky parts of the mountains, but none had crept down so near the cultivated portion of the country, within the present owner's remembrance.

As Frank and Johnny stood looking at it, Philip and Henry, who had not gone more than half-way across the lawn before the whole adventure was over, now came running up to see it too. They also had quite overcome their fright by this time, and eagerly questioned Frank about the particulars of the slaying of the deadly reptile.

Presently Philip produced a piece of string from his pocket, and tying it around the snake's head, proceeded to drag the loathsome creature out of the woods, and on over the lawn toward the house.

Henry and Johnny went with him, but Frank came back to me, where I still sat in the hammock, feeling weak and unnerved by the spectacle I had just witnessed. Here we lingered for a few minutes, till I felt able to return to the house, and then we started across the lawn.

We could see all the family seated upon the porch, and I thought to myself how eagerly I would relate to their astonished ears my little story of Johnny's danger and Frank's brave rescue.

In a moment, however, I saw that Philip, dragging the snake after him, was almost there, and knew that he would have the first chance to tell the good deed.

But that made no difference. So long as Mrs. Todd and her sisters, and Frank's father, and all, could know who had so nobly rushed forward to save little Johnny, I cared not who told the tale.

We hurried on. As we quietly drew near we saw Philip standing alone at the foot of the steps, for Johnny had stopped at the swing, on the way up the lawn, and Henry was obediently swinging him there.

Philip stood with his back somewhat toward us, but we could see his head held high, his curls thrust off his forehead, his cheeks flushed. His voice was ringing with triumph, as he faced them all and poured forth his eager, excited words. And this is what we heard him say:

"And Johnny gave an awful scream, and then I saw the snake with its mouth open and its eyes glaring, and its tail rattling away. But just as it was ready to spring at Johnny, I saw a stick lying on the ground, and quick as lightning I

picked it up and flew over the ground to that snake and whacked it on the head"——

What! Did we hear aright? What was this that Philip was saying? I stood spellbound for a moment, full of astonishment, of indignant amazement. Was it Philip standing there, his eyes shining, his eager young face flushed with excitement, as he glanced first at one and then at another of the listening circle of people about him, all hanging with breathless interest upon the words, the false, false words which fell from his lips!

"Yes," he said, "I hit him a whack and killed him dead. I had to hit three times"——

"Philip!" I exclaimed. But for very amazement my voice came faint and low, and no one heard it, or even seemed to see me where I stood with Frank a few feet away. They were all intent upon Philip's story.

"Philip," said I, hastening forward, "how can you"——

But here I felt a sudden grasp on my arm, and Frank's voice with a sharp note of pain in it, sounded in my ear.

"Don't, Miss Agatha, don't," he begged. "Come with me, please, Miss Agatha. Don't say anything. Come to the old stump with me." And before I could say another word, or make my presence known in any way, Frank had turned me about, and was trying to draw me with him away from the others.

"O Miss Agatha," he whispered, "let me talk to you a little first. Don't say what you were going to. I *must* see you, first. Please, Miss Agatha."

The pleading look in the child's eyes as he turned his face, all puckered with pain and anxiety toward mine, drew me to follow him in spite of myself.

"What is it, Frank?" I said as we walked swiftly away. "Why did you stop me? What does Philip mean by that wicked lie?"

"Come to the stump with me, Miss Agatha. I want to say something," said Frank, more quietly, now that he had me at a safe distance. "What was it you meant to say to them, Miss Agatha?" he asked, when we had reached his favorite seat and I had sat down upon it. He stood before me with the same frightened, beseeching look in his eyes. "Oh, were you going to tell them Philip lied?"

"Of course," I said, still full of indignation at what I had heard. "How could I do otherwise? Did you hear him, Frank? He was saying that he killed the snake."

"Yes," returned Frank, "I know he was. But, please, Miss Agatha, let it go. I could n't bear to have you say anything"——

"'Let it go!' When you killed it? Why, what could Philip mean by standing there and telling such a lie"——

"Oh, I know it was a lie, and it is n't the first time either," said Frank, with his face full of distress. "Miss Agatha, I do n't know that I ought to say anything about my own brother, but let me tell you something. Always, ever since I can remember, Philip has been like this. There is something queer about him. He will tell the most dreadful lies, and no one knows it but me. Sometimes I think he can't help it, and then again I believe he could if he wanted to. But you see it is this way:—All his life Philip has been afraid of things, afraid of the dark, and of being hurt. When we were little fellows, if he had done anything wrong that he thought he might be punished for, he 'd run and hide and tremble all over, and then he 'd come out and tell father and Aunt Margaret that he had n't done it, and they 'd always believe him, and 'most always they 'd punish me instead, because they 'd know one of us must have done it and Aunt Margaret never thought Philip could do wrong. And she 'd tell father, and then I 'd get whipped. But I could stand it better than Philip, for I did n't mind the hurt so much as he would have done, and somehow, when I knew how it would make him feel, I could n't bear to have him frightened so. They never believed me, anyhow, when I did say anything.

"So that 's the way we 've gone on. As we 've grown older, Philip has n't got over it, but to this

day, when he 's done anything wrong he gets out of it in one way or another, and though it makes me almost despise him sometimes when I hear him, I can't bear to tell of him, even if I thought they 'd listen to me, for I know how frightened he gets at the thought of being whipped, and I think so much of him that I can't bear to make him feel so bad.

"There 's something queer about my feeling for Philip," Frank went on; "I 'd rather be hurt myself any day than see him hurt, or even have him shamed or mortified. I know I can bear it better. And somehow, though I think he is often cruel to me," said Frank, with a quiver about his lip, "I do love him, and I 've always thought I 'd be good to him that way, anyhow. I 'd bear his blows for him, if there was nothing else I could do.

"And I suppose," he hastened on, "it 's because he learned to lie this way when he was little, to save himself from being punished, that now he has grown into the way of lying about other things. All his life he has liked to hear of brave people and what they have done. He 's always making me tell him stories about people saving other people's lives and doing noble acts. He seems to have the greatest love for such things, and I suppose it must be because he knows he is n't brave himself, but wishes he was. And he 's so proud he can't bear to have anybody know he 's afraid of anything. He wants 'em to

think he 's as brave as a lion. So they do. For whenever he gets a chance like this to-day, he 'll stand up in front of them all, and tell it off beautifully, only he always fixes it so that he 's the hero of the story. Oh, I know Philip," said Frank, with a little bitterness; " he always looks out for that.

" So now, do n't you see, Miss Agatha," he said, looking into my face imploringly, " why it is that I did n't want you to say anything just now ? I could n't bear to have Philip so shamed before father and every one. Just think how he would have felt if you had told them that he did n't kill the snake! And I know I 'd have felt worse yet. Oh, I do hope you won't say a word about it, Miss Agatha. Promise that you won't."

Hitherto I had had no opportunity to speak, so rapidly had his eager words rushed forth. Even now, when he had paused for some comforting assurance on my part that I would not betray his dearly loved brother, I found my tongue slow to do its duty. I was so astonished, so perplexed, at this sudden revealing of the unfortunate, the altogether wrong relations between the two brothers, and so pained and disturbed with this new glimpse at Philip's character, that I felt unable at the moment to say anything.

" Dear Miss Agatha," implored Frank, putting his hand into mine, " it does n't seem much to ask, does it ? that you will just keep still ? "

"O Frank," I cried, "it is this much to ask, that it is wrong, wrong! How can I keep still and consent that this wickedness should go on? For wickedness it is, my boy. Do you not see it so, too? Do you not know that the brother you love so well will be utterly ruined by this terrible habit of falsehood which has fastened itself upon him, which has grown with his growth, until, even at his early age, it may be too late for him to shake it off? O my child, do you not see that in fostering his falseness you, too, have been false? You say you love Philip too well to shame him, but in shielding this sin of his you may have helped to do what will hurt him far more hereafter than any shame he could bear now, no matter how painful it might be. Just think! as he is now, so he may grow up, a false, wicked man—a liar! My dear, you have not looked at it in that light."

"But I have talked to him," said Frank, earnestly. "I could not have told the others about it, but to Philip I 've talked, oh, so many times! I 've begged him not to do it. I 've told him," said Frank, softening his voice, "how I thought our mother would feel about it. For ever since I 've had her letter, I 've known she 'd want us to be good."

"What did Philip say?"

"He always says he means to be good; but when the times comes he forgets. I do n't think

Philip minds so very much about telling fibs, Miss Agatha. You know a good many boys don't."

"That is only too true," I answered, sorrowfully. "But to think of my bright little friend Philip as one of them! That is bad. And to see him stand there before them all and lie so *happily*, as if he really enjoyed it! I cannot understand him."

"It was because he loves to have them praise him," said Frank.

"How does he dare to do it?" said I. "Did he not know that I would be sure to hear of it and expose him?"

"I don't think he knew you were in the hammock and saw it at all, Miss Agatha, you were so far back among the trees."

"But he knew you were there."

"Yes, but he knew I would n't say a word. He 'd know I could n't be so mean. But I 'll talk to him, Miss Agatha; I truly will," he said, as I tried to rise once more, "if only you won't tell them anything about it."

I was silent. I could not promise Frank what he wished, for I felt that something must be done by somebody to right this wrong, but I was anxious to do the wisest thing. Perhaps it might be well to let Frank speak to his brother once more, and I resolved that I also would first talk to Philip before taking any further steps in the matter.

"I cannot promise you, dear Frank," I said, "that I will not speak of this to your father at some future time, but for the present I will say nothing."

"Oh, thank you, Miss Agatha!" exclaimed Frank, as if I had done him the greatest favor. Then he added in a moment, smiling happily, "Just think, Miss Agatha, to-morrow is your birthday, you know, and they are all planning to have such a good time! Would n't it have been too bad to go and upset everybody by telling about Philip? You forgot that, did n't you, Miss Agatha?"

It was true that my birthday would be on the morrow, and I knew the young people were busily engaged in devising ways and means of celebrating it. I was supposed to know nothing about the preparations, of course, beyond the fact that the day was to be observed in some special manner, but I had been aware for some time of hasty assemblings, busy whisperings and much suppressed giggling among the young folks.

All this meant, I supposed, that some merry-making was in prospect, ostensibly in my honor, of course, but chiefly, I suspected, for the gratification of my young friends themselves. It would have been, as Frank said, a pity to let anything mar the pleasure and harmony of this occasion, and I decided that I must do nothing which would hinder the enjoyment of my natal day.

"You are right, my dear," I said. "I would

not do anything to spoil our pleasure to-morrow, so we will try to forget this trouble about Philip for the present."

Still I could not dismiss it from my mind. As I saw Frank stoop to pat his dog, a sudden thought came to me. "Frank," I said, "was it true that Laddie went out on the log that day, as Philip said, or was that a made-up story too?"

"Oh, yes, it was true that Laddie went out on the log."

"And Philip went out to save him?"

Frank was silent.

"It was not Philip, then?"

"No, Miss Agatha," he said, with a flush.

"Who was it, Frank?"

The boy hesitated a moment. Then he picked up the little dog and pressed him closely in his arms.

"Laddie knows," he said.

CHAPTER XII

MISS AGATHA'S BIRTHDAY

THE first sunbeams darting through my opened blind wakened me next morning. It was too early to rise as yet, but I would not close my eyes for another nap. My thoughts turned to the new friends about me. Even now, for aught I knew, a dozen busy hands and feet might be hurrying about in my service. All these young people round me were no doubt awake, their eager minds intent upon those mysteries I could not help suspecting were afoot. And it was all to give pleasure to a plain old woman whom the most of them had never seen or even heard of a few short weeks before. A careless mention of the day on my part, had been enough to start these merry young things off, and now I felt assured they were all busy "plotting and planning together to take me by surprise," while, for anything I could tell, the whole household might be enlisted in the cause.

As I lay there thinking gratefully of these new-made friends, and wondering a little what special form their "surprise" would take, I heard a faint tap, tap along the hall floor. I knew the

sound well; it came from Frank's halting footsteps, carefully subdued, that nobody might be disturbed. They came nearer and nearer until they paused a moment at my door.

"Dear little Frank, God bless him!" I said to myself. "He is bringing his old friend a birthday gift in his own shy, delicate way." I made no sound, and the steps moved off, presently dying away down the hall.

Then I rose and peeped outside my door. There lay a bunch of pretty woodland leaves, with here and there a flower between them, though there were few flowers to be had at that season, all daintily arranged and with the shining drops of dew still on them. The child must have risen at break of day and wandered far to find them, and now had come in his unassuming, silent way to offer them to his friend and thus assure her of his love. Dear, thoughtful lad! Again I said, "God bless him!" and dressed as quickly as I could, that I might seek and thank him for his pretty gift. No matter what the others might do, no one could bring such a thrill of pleasure to my heart as Frank had done by this simple, loving act.

It was not so difficult to find Frank now as it had been in the early days of our acquaintance. I had only to go to the old stump with its broad-spreading top, out under the trees at the side of the house. There, after I had thanked him in

my quiet fashion for his gift, we sat down and chatted happily together. Laddie was instructed to offer a paw of congratulation, in honor of the day, and was also persuaded to perform one or two new tricks, learned especially for the occasion.

Before that was well over, Philip and Ralph had rushed upon us with their merry greetings, then the girls came, and next Mrs. Todd, Johnny and the aunties. And when the breakfast-bell rang and we all went in together, there were more hearty greetings to go through with, from Mr. Sinclair's cordial clasp of the hand and "Many happy returns of the day, Miss Poppelheimer," and his sister's more formal word of congratulation, down to the beaming smiles of our waiter-boy and the broad grin on Aunt Mimy's face as she stood in the doorway leading to her own regions, with little Saint and Sinner peeping round her skirts.

Who could help feeling touched by so much kindness? I was obliged to put up a hasty hand and brush something from my eyes before I could see my plate quite plainly. And there, when I did recover my sight, lay two little keepsakes, one from each of the girls, pretty gifts made by their own hands, which I shall treasure all my life for the givers' sakes.

When we began to eat, I remember we had eggs, and mine, placed in the little glass by my

plate, was specially decorated with a tiny blue ribbon neatly tied about its center. When I stood it up in its glass and chipped the end of the shell, which is my way of eating an egg, I discovered that it must have been laid by an entirely new-fashioned kind of a hen, for its contents consisted wholly of fine white sugar.

This, of course, was a matter of some surprise to me, and I gave a puzzled glance around the table. Every one else seemed, apparently, as surprised as I, with the exception of two bright-eyed boys, who tried to look unconscious, but failing in this attempt, set up a hearty laugh instead, through which I could hear Sinner's shrill, high treble and Aunt Mimy's gruffer tones joining in from the kitchen.

"Now where could this have come from?" cried I, holding up my egg for all to see. "I have heard of the goose that laid golden eggs, but never of a hen that laid eggs of sugar. Mrs. Dale, I thought I had seen all of your hens, but you never showed me this kind."

"Indeed, I didn't know I had it," said Mrs. Dale. "Somebody must have found a nest of eggs about which I knew nothing at all."

"I suspect that I know the very two boys who found this wonderful nest," said I, shaking my finger at Philip and Ralph. Then they laughed again, and another triumphant squeal came from Sinner in the kitchen.

"But, seriously, how did the sugar get there?" I asked, turning the egg about, perplexed for the moment.

"Untie it. That will solve the mystery, I suspect," said Mr. Sinclair.

So I untied the blue ribbon, and now it was easy to see how it had been made to serve not only an ornamental but a useful purpose as well, for by its means a small chipping in the egg-shell, through which the original contents had been drawn and the sugar inserted instead, had been effectually concealed.

After we had had a few more merry words about the wonderful sugar egg, and Philip had confessed that it was his present to Miss Agatha, we began breakfast again in earnest, and I picked up the muffin which lay in a little dish at the side of my plate. Here was a fresh surprise, for it suddenly fell open and out dropped a mouse, evidently placed there with a view to filling me with fright and dire dismay. It might have fulfilled its mission better if I had not at once recognized it as being the same brown chocolate creature which I had myself given to Johnny as my share of the general contribution to that young gentleman's treasures upon our return from Mount Lorrington, an evening or two before. It caused another laugh, of course, and I shook my finger at Ralph again, for that it was his gift was plainly to be seen in spite of his ap-

parent unconsciousness of all that was going on about him, and his abstracted gaze out of the window at something in the extreme distance. Thus the morning of my birthday may be said to have begun most auspiciously.

Nothing more of special interest transpired, and I began to think that after all I must have been mistaken about the mysterious whisperings and conversations I had observed. Probably, I thought, they all referred to the gifts which had already been bestowed upon me. Still, it was a little strange, when Frank and I returned from our afternoon walk about five o'clock, to find the house so quiet and the grounds quite deserted. Out in the orchard we could see John Dale directing his men, and Mr. Sinclair was with him, but not one of the young people was visible. Once or twice I thought I heard the sound of laughter from some upper room at the back of the house, but not a glimpse could we catch of anybody.

It was strange, too, to find that the parlor door was locked when we tried to open it. I fancied that Frank looked wise when I expressed my surprise at this singular occurrence, but as he said nothing, I likewise refrained from further remarks, and together we went out to the hammock at the side of the house, to await supper.

On this day, I can scarcely tell how, our talk fell more than it had ever done upon myself, and

I told Frank many things about my life in my own home. I described the pretty country all about it and the home itself, with the warm, true friends I had around me there. The boy was greatly pleased, as I could see from his intent, eager eyes. He was especially interested in one friend of my girlhood's days, an elderly maiden woman like myself, who loved animals as well as even he could. I told him of her houseful of dogs and cats, monkeys, parrots, birds of different kinds, of her white mice, her rabbits and guinea-pigs, her tame squirrels, and even a Texas toad and wicked-looking little green lizard which formed part of the collection.

"Do n't I wish I could see 'em, Miss Agatha!" said Frank, with his brightest smile.

"So you shall, my dear," I answered. "I hope you will see them many times."

I said no more at the moment. I had long been thinking that when the time should come for us to part, I would ask Mr. Sinclair to let me take Frank to my own home and keep him with me for a year or two. It seemed to me that if he could for a time be entirely removed from his own people, his better nature might have more freedom to develop itself than was possible, under the peculiar circumstances, in his home. On many accounts it might be better also that the brothers should be separated at this period of their lives. I could not but feel that each was

hurting the other. Certainly their daily life together, in which Philip not only claimed the lion's share in every good thing and selfishly engrossed the love and admiration of all their friends, but even carelessly, nay, heartlessly, permitted his brother to bear those reproofs and punishments which should by right have fallen on himself, had already wrought great evil to Frank, while the hiding and shielding, on Frank's part, of his brother's faults, the giving way to his selfish habits, the mistaken notion that he himself must "bear his blows for him," could not but in the end work Philip's ruin.

I sat silent a moment thinking of this, but feeling that it would be best to say nothing of my plans for the future to Frank, when he suddenly gave a start and sprang up from my side.

"Good-bye, Miss Agatha," he said hastily. "I have to go now."

"Why, what's the matter, Frank?" I asked, in surprise, as I saw a look of annoyance on his face. I turned my head, and there, strolling toward us across the grass, was Mrs. Archer. She was all alone, with a book in her hand. She had come out, tempted by the beauty of the afternoon, no doubt, to read on the lawn and, seeing no one else at hand, was evidently about to bestow her society upon us.

"Don't go, Frank," I said. "Stay with us, and be nice to your Aunt Margaret."

But he was already limping off, with the old frown on his face. In spite of all my teachings a glimpse of his Aunt Margaret still brought it there.

"Be a good boy, Frank, and stay," I called to him.

"Oh, please, no, Miss Agatha," he answered, looking back. "I can't stay now. Truly, I have to go."

"Foolish boy!" I exclaimed. But he was already too far away to hear me.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Archer approached the hammock and seated herself in a rustic chair at my side. After a commonplace remark or two, she said: "I see I have driven your shadow away, as usual."

"My shadow?" I repeated. "Oh, you mean Frank."

"Yes," she said, and before I could make any answer she spoke again. "It is the strangest thing to me, Miss Poppelheimer, how you can see anything to like in that boy. Of course you cannot wonder that we should all observe your unusual interest in him. If it had been Philip, indeed,—but Frank! That he, of all children, with his dull, hateful ways, should have attracted your regard to such a remarkable degree, I confess I cannot understand. Certainly," she went on with a bitter smile, "we should congratulate ourselves upon his making such a friend, the first one, I think, that he has ever found."

"That is just it," I said quickly. "It was because I saw him lonely, sad, and living apart from everybody, that I felt drawn toward him, and when I had broken through the outer crust of reserve and had learned to know him, I found what a warm, loving nature the child has, and"——

But she would not permit me to proceed further.

"Warm, loving nature, indeed!" she repeated scornfully. "You are truly the only person who has ever discovered it. To us who have known him far longer than you, he has always been the same gloomy, repulsive boy that in every one's eyes but yours he is to-day. And instead of the loving nature you speak of, we who have seen him grow up from babyhood, have found him to be simply a sullen, morose, stupid child, shunning and apparently hating even his own people; while Philip, on the other hand, has been ever the joy of the whole household; bright, winning, beautiful, with the sweetest nature. But you have never seemed to care for Philip, which is so strange"——

"Philip has so many friends," I said gently; "but Frank seems to have only me. That, of itself, was enough to make me wish to be his friend. When I saw that even his own people, if you will pardon me for saying it, apparently cared nothing for him"——

"But whose fault is it if we do not care for him?" she interrupted. "You see what he is—or, rather, you do not see," she went on indignantly. "You seem to view him through some veil which your imagination has created, and it has lent an entirely different aspect to his looks and behavior and his whole character from the true one. No, you do not understand him, Miss Poppelheimer. You fancy him a down-trodden, abused child, whom his people have wilfully neglected all his life, whereas the facts are that their father has scrupulously insisted from the very first that the two brothers should be treated alike, and share alike in everything. And I have been careful to respect his wishes by giving them the same care, the same nursing, the same clothing, the same food, the same"——

"But not the same love," I put in softly.

"No," said Mrs. Archer, after a momentary pause. "No, I grant," she said, drawing herself up haughtily, "that there has not been the same love. There could not be that. When I think of my beautiful Philip, with his frank, noble nature, and compare him with that gloomy, shuffling, loutish boy, I feel that the two can never occupy a place in my affections together. And so it is with his father. But we are kind, as kind as he will permit us to be. We have never neglected him and never will. Everything which can be done for his success in life, if there can be

success for such as he, his father will do to the utmost of his means, which are not at all large."

If it could have fallen out that I was holding this conversation with Mr. Sinclair instead of his sister, as I would have liked, I should now have felt that I could open my whole mind to him in regard to his son Frank. I could have told him how sure I was that they had all formed a mistaken estimate of the child's character, and could have delicately pointed out the many grave errors of which I thought his sister had been guilty in her manner of bringing up the boy so early left to her care. But I did not wish to say these things to Mrs. Archer. In the first place, there was a hauteur about her which always held me at arm's length, and made me unwilling to venture upon any clashing of opinion, if it could be avoided. It is not pleasant to have the spirit utterly crushed within one, and this had invariably been the result of Mrs. Archer's manner on the few occasions when I had openly differed from any of her views. There are people in the world who can, by the mere turning of the head, the lifting of an eyebrow, make you feel yourself a guilty wretch, even when you know your motives to be as innocent as those of a baby. Mrs. Archer had always had this effect upon me, whenever, as I say, I had dared to disagree with her.

For this reason I did not wish to enter upon a

discussion of Frank's character with his aunt, especially as I believed it would be of no help to the child himself.

But there was also another and better reason. I felt that in such a matter the father was the right one to appeal to. It was to him I must go and plead his boy's cause, to him I must try to speak such earnest words as should open his eyes and make him see the harm which had already been wrought and must continue to be in the future, if his son could not be, in some way, protected from the blight of this mistaken woman's influence.

As I sat apparently listening to what Mrs. Archer was saying, I resolved that I would no longer delay, that I would throw all foolish timidity to the winds and seek an early opportunity to tell my side of the story to Frank's father.

In the meantime I tried to lead my companion somewhat away from the main subject of our conversation by mentioning my wish to take Frank home with me in the fall. "You will none of you feel it a hardship, surely, to part with him," I said, with perhaps a grain of malice, "and to me it would be a pleasure to have the boy with me. Of course," I added, "I have said nothing to Frank as yet, but do you not think his father will consent to give him to me for a time?"

"What!" she said in great surprise. "What! to take him to your own home? Frank, you mean, and not Philip?"

"I should like to take Frank," I said gravely.

"The children have never been separated," she remarked coldly, after a moment's pause. "I doubt the wisdom of making any change now. There is also Frank's school to be thought of," she added, with the air of one trying to raise objections.

"Oh, I will see to all that," I said quickly. "I will have him carefully taught by the best masters. That is a part of my little scheme. He shall have every advantage which I can give him."

"Why, how long, pray, do you wish to keep him?" asked Mrs. Archer, still apparently greatly astonished.

"Oh," I said eagerly, "we need set no time, surely. Let him come for an indefinite stay. You know I am much alone, with few young people at present about me. Frank suits me, and I will take good care of him. I do not believe his father will ever regret it if he gives his consent."

"Well, really," exclaimed Mrs. Archer, "this is the last thing which we could have expected, that that boy should at last have made a friend for himself, and such a friend, too!"

There was a little flush on her face, and I

fancied that it arose from annoyance. "However," she added coldly, "as I just said, I think it very doubtful if his father will consent to have his children separated, especially for any length of time. But see," she said, looking at her watch, "it is almost time for supper. Suppose we go in."

I saw she was anxious to drop the subject, and so said no more. I resolved, however, that I would soon lay the matter before Frank's father, for since the talk which had just taken place between his aunt and myself, I was more than ever anxious to have Frank removed from her charge.

Just as we were rising from our seats to go into the house, we saw the young people, accompanied by Mrs. Todd and Johnny, strolling toward us. They were talking merrily together as they passed on over the lawn.

"I wonder what they are all coming out for just before supper," I observed.

"Let us sit down and wait," said Mrs. Archer.

Presently they arrived and seated themselves near us, Philip and Ralph throwing themselves on the grass as usual and the girls sitting together, of course, on a convenient log. They all assumed a blank expression of having nothing in particular to think about, which informed me at once that some mystery was at hand. Still, no word was said beyond the usual little nothings of the hour.

Very soon, however, the mystery was explained. Across the lawn came a little figure in a ragged red shirt and a pair of short brown trousers much the worse for wear. Above these garments appeared the shining black countenance of Aunt Mimy's grandson, known among us all as Saint. Borne aloft in his hands with the greatest care, was something which at that distance I could only see was large and round and white. Sinner danced along at his side. As they drew nearer we could hear him admonishing her not to touch him.

"Dar yuh go!" he said. "Gran 'll spank us bof inter de middle ob nex' week 'f yo' hit dis yer. Go 'way dar, yo' nig!" Then he came on, picking his way through the people grouped about, till he stepped up in front of me where I still sat in the hammock.

"Gran's comblemunts," he said, an uneasy grin on his round black face, as he held out his precious burden, which I now saw was an immense cake, all covered with beautiful icing, which peeped out from beneath a napkin.

"Gran's comblemunts—no, I forgot." Here he stopped short, and made me a low bow, still holding his cake with the greatest care. "Gran's comblemunts," he began again, "to Missie Poppel—Popper—Pop —— Golly! I done forgot it *so* quick!"

Saint suddenly stopped short again, looking

the picture of misery, while we could imagine the red creeping all over his face, though we could not see it.

"Gran's comblemunts," he said, standing on one foot and fixing his eyes sternly on a certain stone for help. "Gran's comblemunts to Missie Pop—Pop—Pop"——

——"goes the weasel," burst in Ralph, with a loud shout. "That 's what it is."

"No, 't ain't dat ar needer," said poor Saint, wriggling about uneasily, but with a grin on his face, too. "Gol! I done knowed I could n't fix dat name nohow," said the poor little fellow, holding the cake out to me beseechingly. "To Missie Popple—Pop"——

"Pop it into her lap," shouted Ralph again, while I reached out my hands and took the beautiful cake from the little messenger, telling him not to mind, that he was a good little boy and had done his errand very well and that it made no difference about the hard name anyway.

Sinner, who had stood by her brother all this time, now put in her word in the most disgusted tone.

"Lor'! dat ain't not'in', dat ain't. *I* knowed it all de time. Dat fool nig doan' know not'in'. I got on ter dat name fus' ting. But gran, she doan' nebba tink I know tings. It 's Missie Pop-in-time. Dat 's what it is, Missie Pop-in-

"Gran's comblemunts," he said

time." And Sinner suddenly spread out her scanty blue and yellow skirts, and standing on one foot, proceeded to whirl round like a magnified, gaily-decked spinning top.

Of course we all laughed. No one could help laughing at such comical little people. Then we began to examine Aunt Mimy's beautiful birthday cake.

"She was so stingy of it," said Philip, "that she would n't let Ralph and me have even one little peek at it till you 'd seen it, Miss Agatha. So we told the girls about it and came out to see how surprised you 'd be. Does n't it smell good?"

"Yes, indeed!" I answered, "and looks good, too. I declare it is so pretty with all those curly little ornaments on the top of it, it seems a pity to cut it up."

"Oh, I do n't know that," said Philip, rather anxiously. "Of course Aunt Mimy meant to have it eaten."

"Of course!" said Ralph, energetically. "You would n't think of keeping it just to look at, Miss Agatha?"

"Well, perhaps not," I answered, "especially with two such hungry looking boys about—with four such hungry little folks about," I added, correcting myself, for Saint and Sinner were still lingering near, gazing with big eyes at the beautiful cake, and I knew they were thinking how good it would taste, too.

"Ki-i!" squealed Sinner at this point. She was a sharp little thing, and knew that I meant that she and her brother were to have their share of "gran's" toothsome dainty.

"Ki-i!" she screamed triumphantly, and seizing her brother by the arm, cried, "Come on, dar's de suppa-bell. Le's go an' peek tru de winda, an' see dey-all when dey cuts dat cake. Dey 'll sabe some for us. Missie Pop, she jes' as good as said so."

And off they started at a full run across the lawn, followed more leisurely by the rest of us; for Henry, the waiter-boy, stood in the kitchen-door ringing the great bell for supper. Behind him I caught a glimpse of Aunt Mimy, anxiously peeping out at Philip and Ralph, who had kindly volunteered to relieve me of all charge of the precious cake on its journey back to the house.

I waved my hand and nodded vigorously to her until I should be able to thank her more fittingly for her tempting gift, and then we all passed into the dining-room through the outside door, the two boys bearing the cake aloft in great triumph.

I cannot remember that anything worthy of note occurred at the table that evening. But an hour later, when some of us older people were sitting under the trees, Henry suddenly appeared before me with a large, square envelope on a silver

card receiver, which he presented with a courtly bow and his usual benevolent smile, and which I discovered to be an elaborately worded invitation to be present at a grand entertainment to be given in the parlor by the young people and various other members of the household to "Miss Agatha Poppelheimer, as a slight token of their regard, and in honor of her birthday." So this was what all the secrecy and the busy whispering for so many days had been about.

The hour appointed for the entertainment was eight, and as if to warn us of that fact, somebody at that moment rang the great dinner-bell on the porch. Gertrude came and led me into the parlor to what seemed to be the throne of honor, a very easy, low chair in the center of the front row of seats which were grouped together at the upper end of the long room.

Several of these seats were already occupied by some of the hotel guests, who had evidently been invited to witness the performance. Very soon various members of our own party came in and seated themselves till nearly all the chairs were filled. Glancing over to the four windows at the side of the room I beheld the jolly, good-natured faces, old and young, of the different servants about the house and farm, standing outside, ready to enter into the pleasures of the evening as eagerly as anybody. Even old Uncle Jone stood at one of the windows, holding his little

grandchild high in his arms, that she might see as well as the others.

Shortly after we had all settled ourselves quietly in our seats, I perceived Frank in the hall near the door, looking as though he scarcely knew whether to venture in or not. I caught his eye and beckoned to him to come and sit by me. He came in timidly, yet bravely, too, and as he drew near, looked into my face with his own shy smile. But after all some one had taken the chair near me. I looked about somewhat uncertainly for another, when to my great surprise I heard Mr. Sinclair behind me say:

"Here, Frank, come here. Here is your place by me, my son."

Turning around, I saw him reach out and draw the child to him. The boy gave one swift glance at his father, and then edging his way among the chairs, sat down softly by his side. There came a slow blush over all his face, and even his ears and neck, as he rested there, sheltered for the moment by his father's arm. He sat motionless, as if he dared not stir, lest he might wake and find it all a dream that at last, even to him who was only Frank, had come the tender word, the pleased smile, for which his heart had pined so long. As for myself, I could not at once withdraw my gaze from either of them. I, too, felt in a dream. What did it mean? Was Frank's father at last beginning to see the boy as he

really was? Would all be right between them now?

If anything was needed to add to my enjoyment of the entertainment which these kind-hearted young people—blessings on them!—had spent long hours planning and preparing, it was just this. Now and then through all the pantomime and singing and dancing,—in the latter of which Saint and Sinner took a joyous and most appreciated part,—which illustrated "The Yarn of the Nancy Bell," I could not help glancing around to see how Frank was enjoying it, and was struck with the same rapt expression which he had had earlier in the evening. His father's arm was no longer about his shoulders, but still the boy felt himself near him, safe and sheltered at his father's side. He saw me as I turned to look at him, but responded only with a faint smile and a lifting of the eyelids. It was as if he scarcely dared to stir lest the charm should be broken.

When it was all over, and I found him in the hall with his cheeks still flushed and his eyes shining with joy, I said:—

"Have you had a pleasant time, Frank?"

"Yes, Miss Agatha," he answered, with a little break in his voice. "Oh, I didn't know that any one could be so happy as I am to-night!"

I went to my own room glad in Frank's joy. Again and again as I lay in my bed I heard the

tremble in his voice and saw the quiver of his lip as he turned his face to mine, and said,

"I shall always remember your birthday, Miss Agatha."

"Please God, the worst is over between them," I thought. "There are brighter days ahead for my dear lad, now."

Then I tried to go to sleep, but I could not do so. Always, as I had nearly dropped off, I would find myself wide awake again laughing over little Saint holding the great cake out to me, with his black face all puckered up in his attempts to remember my hard name, or his impish sister would again be flying round in a circle, triumphantly declaring that she "knowed it was Pop-in-time de berry fus' ting."

However, my last waking thought must have been given to Aunt Mimy, as I recalled the delight which shone in her broad face when she heard the loud applause which greeted her little grandchildren, as they finished their pretty dance, made their low bows, and ran down to her arms where she stood in the hall doorway.

CHAPTER XIII

WHO SHOT THE HORSE

A FEW mornings later, I was sitting with my book under the trees at the west side of the house, when Philip chanced to draw near. He was alone, and it occurred to me that here was the opportunity for which I had been seeking ever since the day when the snake had been killed.

I wished to see if I could not, by pointing out some of his faults, kindly and gently, and by showing him how wrong his conduct had been on that occasion, bring about a better way of thinking on his part, with a determination to break away from those habits of untruthfulness and deceit which must surely, if not speedily overcome, lead to his utter ruin.

It had crossed my mind more than once since that day that Philip seemed to shun me. To be sure, during the birthday festivities he had been quite his own frank and genial self, but afterward I observed that he did not come to me any more for those merry chats which he had once seemed to enjoy as well as I, and several times when I addressed some casual remark to him, I

fancied he turned away with something of a frown and an uneasy look on his face, as if he wished to withdraw himself from my notice.

Whether this were fancy on my part, or whether Frank had "talked to him," as he had promised, I did not know. I thought it quite probable, however, that such an interview had taken place between the brothers, and that Philip, feeling ashamed and uncomfortable in the knowledge of my being a witness of the killing of the snake and a listener to the false story he had told in regard to it, was now as anxious to avoid me as formerly he had been willing to respond to my slightest invitation to a friendly chat or stroll, whenever his many other occupations did not stand in the way.

"Come here, Philip," I said, "and let us talk together a little while."

But Philip, as soon as his eyes rested on me, stopped and hesitated, as if he wished to turn away, and now when I called to him, he still hung back and seemed unwilling to come. There was a sullen look on his face, and when I rose from my seat and held out my hand to him, he drew away, muttering something which I could not catch.

"Philip, do n't go," I said. "I want to talk to you a little about something which happened the other day."

"I know you do," he suddenly burst out. "I

know you do. I know all about it, and I won't stay to hear it. It's none of your business, and I don't care if you did hear every word of it. I'll say what I please, for all you and Frank. It's only Frank you care about, anyhow. You've always liked him, and you never cared about me. You just hate me."

"Philip!" I exclaimed, astonished, looking at the angry boy who stood in front of me with his hands clenched and his eyes fairly blazing with wrath. I tried to get in a word, but he would not let me.

"Yes, Frank's the one you've chosen. And Aunt Margaret says it's the strangest thing. You're going to take him to your own beautiful home, and give him everything he wants, only I hope father won't let him go. And Aunt Margaret says she believes you'll leave all your money to him when you die. You can't bear me, but I don't care. I'm glad of it, for I just hate you, you old Miss Agatha. So there!"

With that, he whirled about in the path and rushed off to the house, leaving me utterly astounded at the angry words which he had hurled upon me, and at the angrier looks.

I sat quite still, too confused for the moment to think. Then it all came back to me. What a rage the child had been in! He knew that I was aware of his untruthfulness, and hated me because I knew it. He begrudged his brother the

one friend whom the lonely boy had ever gained and had flown into a passion in which envy, jealousy and all unkindness had their share, because that friend had not been given to him instead. Poor, angry Philip!

Yet when I thought it over I could not be angry with him, even if he did hate "old Miss Agatha." I remembered the child's faulty bringing up. What could one expect from two children reared in such an atmosphere as centered round their Aunt Margaret? If it had been bad for Frank, Philip had, in his way, been injured no less. She was a strange woman, I thought. How little discretion she had shown in confiding to a child like Philip any speculations she might have in regard to the future disposal of my property! I felt like laughing as I thought of it. Was there ever a woman who could look so wise and yet say such foolish things as Mrs. Archer!

However, I could not laugh when I thought of Philip, but wondered how I could make friends with him or gain any influence over him again. Perhaps I was only a foolish old maid, and as anybody might have said, it was none of my business, but I had really wanted to help the boy and had a sore feeling in my heart because I had so utterly failed.

That was an unlucky day! If I had been saddened all the morning by what had happened be-

tween Philip and me, it was nothing to the consternation, the grief, which I experienced at a later hour. Even after this lapse of time I hate to think about it; but it has its place in my story and must be told.

It was about four in the afternoon and I was sitting alone in my own room, when I heard the sound of a gun fired, apparently close at hand. I was not particularly startled, because it was no uncommon thing for Mr. Sinclair and John Dale, and even the servants, to shoot at whatever game they might find, or at a target set up somewhere in the woods. I gave it a momentary thought and then dismissing it from my mind went on with my work.

But about half an hour later, when I came down from my room, I saw a little group of people gathered on the porch, talking over something very eagerly and anxiously. Mrs. Archer and Mrs. Dale were there and two or three of the other ladies also. Madge was speaking excitedly as I approached.

"O Miss Agatha," she cried, as she saw me, "what dreadful thing do you think has happened? Frank has killed Mrs. Dale's very best horse!"

"Why, Madge, you cannot mean it!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, indeed!" she said. "He has shot him with father's gun, and the horse is dying up there on the side hill." She pointed to the hill which

was back of the garden at the south side of the house. We could see some men there bending over a dark form which I knew must be "Prince Charlie," a favorite young horse of Mrs. Dale's and considered the most valuable animal on the farm.

There were tears in Mrs. Dale's eyes, and Gertrude was weeping silently.

"How did it happen? Did you say it was Frank?" I asked in amazement.

"Yes, it was Frank, the boy you have been teaching yourself to think everything that is trustworthy, noble and good," said Mrs. Archer, with a flushed, indignant face. "I think now you will admit how mistaken you have been in your estimate of his character. He has deliberately gone to his father's room, taken his gun, which all three of the children have always been forbidden to touch, loaded it and carried it off with him to the woods. And this is the result! But it has always been so. From his very babyhood he has been the same sly, underhanded boy, always making mischief in his silent way. In spite of his hermit-like mode of living and his habit of shunning every one around him, all the harm which has been wrought about the house has been chiefly his doing. His father has been compelled to punish him a hundred times where Philip has been punished once. For Philip, with all his merry, careless ways, would never wilfully

do wrong. The two are as different as day and night."

Here something impelled me to say, "How do you know Frank did it? Did any one see him?"

"No, no one saw him; but of course he did it," said Madge. "I will tell you all about it, Miss Agatha. Father and I were taking a walk up there on the top of the hill when we heard the gun go off, and then we heard some one scream. We flew down the hill, through the trees, till we came to the clearing over there," pointing to where we could see the people gathered about Prince Charlie, "and there stood Frank all alone, looking at the horse in a dazed kind of way, as if he did n't know what he was doing. The gun was right down at his feet, and the poor horse was lying there in his agony.

"Just as we came down the hill, Mr. Dale rushed up from the garden where he had been at work. So we all got there together. Father knew right away that Frank must have done it, for no one else was there, and it could n't have been any one but him. So father spoke to him pretty sternly, and Frank began to tremble all over and looked as if he wanted to sink into the ground. But he told father he did n't do it. He said he was just in among the trees a little way and he heard the shot and came out and saw the horse and the gun lying there, but no one else was there.

"We could n't believe a word of it, though, for he looked guilty all over him, and besides, father said if he had been only such a little way off among the trees, as he must have been to get to the spot before we did, he must have been near enough to see the one run away who had shot the horse; for we were there in two minutes after the gun went off, and so was Mr. Dale, and Frank was there before that. Father and Mr. Dale both said that no one could have got up among the trees without some one seeing them, so of course it must have been Frank.

"But when father talked to him and commanded him to tell the truth, and confess that he killed the horse, he would not do it, but just trembled and cried and said, 'O father, do *try* to believe me! I did n't do it, I did not.' But when father asked him, 'Who did then?' he hung his head and hesitated and then said, 'I do n't know, and I do n't want to know.' And that was all we could get out of him. Then he put on his sullen frown and looked as hateful and obstinate as a mule and would n't say a word. So father told him to go to his room, and stay there till he saw him again. I do n't envy Frank when he does see him again, for my part."

"Oh, I hope your father will do nothing rash, dear Madge," I said. "I hope he will at least wait till he is sure that Frank did it. For my part, I cannot believe that he is the guilty one.

If he said he did not do it, I believe him. I know that he would not lie about it. Where was Philip?"

"Yes, no doubt you would like to think it was Philip," exclaimed Mrs. Archer, with scorn on her lip and a steely gleam in her eye. "Have I not told you that Philip is *not* disobedient, *not* malicious, *not* vicious in any way? Is it likely that he would go to his father's room, take his gun against his express command, carry it to the woods and shoot a horse with it? It grows somewhat chilly out here; I shall go in," she said loftily, as she drew her scarf about her shoulders and stepped haughtily away.

"Philip and Ralph were nowhere around, Miss Agatha," Madge put in coldly, "and haven't been since dinner-time. I suppose they are off playing somewhere."

Just here Mr. Sinclair approached. He had an angry, shamed look on his face, and did not stop to speak to anybody, but glancing neither to the right nor the left, ascended the steps and went into the hall, and up the stairs to his own room.

I trembled for Frank, fearing his father was even then on his way to punish him. I was somewhat relieved, however, to hear John Dale say that he himself had begged Mr. Sinclair to do nothing until it could be more definitely ascertained whether the boy had spoken the truth or not. Mr. Sinclair had agreed to wait until he

could question Philip and Ralph, and until John could learn the whereabouts of the different men about the farm at the time of the accident.

However, both men felt positive in their own minds that it must have been Frank who had shot the horse; for there had been no time, they thought, for any one to escape to the trees and conceal themselves, so quickly had Mr. Sinclair, Madge and John Dale appeared upon the scene.

The poor horse was now quite dead, lying stretched upon the grass, where a short hour ago he had been happily feeding. Mrs. Dale and Gertrude found it impossible to restrain their tears as they gazed up the hillside at their beautiful pet, and John looked anxious and sad, as he turned away and left us.

But for my part, I could not think that it was Frank who had shot the horse. I wished that I could see the boy and learn from his own lips exactly what had taken place. But he had been sent to his own room in disgrace, and was doubtless there now, shut in alone with his misery, needing comfort and sympathy and finding it nowhere, his spirit wounded and sore from the stern displeasure and harsh reproofs of the father whom he loved so dearly, his whole being roused in resentment at this great trouble so suddenly thrust upon him, and with the thought that no one would believe him. I longed to assure him

that I, at least, was still his staunch old friend, that in spite of every apparent evidence to the contrary, I was sure of his innocence. Since he had said that he did not kill the horse I believed him.

I hoped to see him after supper, but he was not at the table, nor was he to be found in any of his usual haunts after the meal was over. The other boys, too, were very late. They came strolling past the side porch, where we could see them through the door of the dining-room, when we had almost finished supper.

They looked tired and warm, as if they had had a long walk, but otherwise seemed quite their own bright selves. Philip was talking very fast about something in his merry way and Ralph was listening.

Mr. Sinclair rose from the table and went out to the porch to speak to them. Presently we all followed him, anxious to see what light the two boys could throw upon the accident. Mr. Sinclair was questioning them closely. I heard him ask them where they had been all the afternoon.

"Why, up to the hotel, flying kites with Tom Murray and the other boys," said Philip, who as usual was spokesman. "Why, father?"

"Do you know what a sad accident we have had here?" asked his father.

"Why, no,—what?" exclaimed Philip, with his eyes opened wide.

Mr. Sinclair then told them about the killing of the horse.

"You are sure you know nothing about it?" he asked.

"How could we, father? We've been away all the afternoon. Tom came down here for us to go up with him to the hotel just after dinner. We went right away, and we've been there ever since. How could we know anything about it?"

"That is certainly true, brother," said Mrs. Archer. "I saw Tom Murray when he came, and heard him ask the boys to go with him, and saw them start off together."

"I think that settles it," said Mr. Sinclair. "You definitely say that you did not go to my room and get my gun and that you did not shoot the horse, Philip?"

"Father, I did not," said Philip solemnly.

Mr. Sinclair glanced at Ralph, when Mrs. Todd said:

"Ralph, you did not?"

Ralph shook his head, and Philip said quickly: "How could he when we were together all the time?"

For one minute it flashed across my mind that Ralph, at least, knew something about it, for when his mother lifted her head with a little pride and said, "I know that he did not, because he says so, and whatever fault my son may have he has never lied to me yet!" I saw Ralph's face

flush, and he hung his head. However, it might have been his mother's praise which caused his embarrassment.

"There is nothing more to be said, then," said Mr. Sinclair, shortly. He drew in his breath sharply, and I saw his face darken as he turned away.

"O Frank, Frank, my poor boy!" thought I. "If I could help you to bear it!" I knew what that determined look must mean.

Mr. Sinclair went through the dining-room, on through the hall and so, I supposed, on up the stairs to Frank's room, for a little time after we saw him passing by the side of the house, and Frank was with him. The boy was sobbing and limping along as quickly as he could, held in the strong grasp of his father's hand. They were on their way to the barn.

I know not what happened then, for I could stay no longer. Old woman as I was, I turned from everybody and fled, more swiftly than I would have believed I could, to the solitude of my own room, and there I flung myself upon my pillow and wept bitter, bitter tears for my little lad.

Why must he bear this new trouble? Had not his lot been hard enough before? Must his sad little heart be torn anew by his father's cruel blows and crueler words?

I could not believe the child had done the deed.

All my life I have not only loved my friends, I have *believed* in them. Having taken Frank into my very heart I could not now think him false in word or act. "He says he did not do it, and I believe him," I kept saying. "I know him to be truthful in spite of everything his aunt can say."

Was he shielding Philip as usual? But that seemed impossible. Philip had appeared absolutely innocent and unconscious. His aunt had observed him on his way to the hotel, and I could not see how it was possible for him to have been in two places at once. I could not but admit that things looked very black for Frank.

I did not leave my room that evening. I went to bed at an earlier hour than usual, but slept only by uneasy snatches until the early morning. Then I rose, dressed quickly and hastened out of doors to find my little friend, to comfort him, to assure him of my faith and trust in him, to give him my tender, loving sympathy.

But I could find him nowhere. Though I hunted in every spot where I had ever seen him, it was quite useless. I listened for Laddie's joyous barking with which he was wont to greet me every morning, rushing out from some place of concealment among the bushes and fairly prostrating himself at my feet in the intensity of his welcome, but he was absent now. Both boy and dog had vanished from the scene almost as if they had never existed.

I wandered sadly among the paths and nooks where I thought they might possibly be hidden, but with no result except to tire my poor old feet and wet my skirts with the mountain dew. Finally I found myself approaching the spot where the accident had happened. I came down the hill, as Madge and her father had done the day before, through the woods which bordered the clearing where Frank had stood when they found him alone with the gun at his feet. A few yards farther down the hill I could see where the wounded horse in his dying agony had torn the ground all round him with his hoofs. He was there no longer, but the signs of his struggle were visible still, and would be for many a long day.

As I thought of the sorrow of the Dale family over their beautiful pet, I grieved with them anew. But at least it was some small comfort to know that they were to suffer no pecuniary loss from the cruel disaster. For Gertrude, late that night, on her way to bed, had confided to me that Mr. Sinclair had told her mother that he should hold himself responsible for the money part of the misfortune, insisting that he and he alone, must undo, so far as lay in his power, the wrong which his son had done. I had thought of making good the loss myself in some tactful way, for Mrs. Dale could not afford to bear it.

From several little things which I had ob-

served, I believed that Mr. Sinclair was not a rich man, and, indeed, his sister had told me as much. I should have been pleased, therefore, if the loss need not have fallen upon him either, but of course when I learned of his positive decision in the matter there was nothing for me to say. I would not venture to cross his path in such a case as this, though I heartily hoped I might soon find courage to do so in something which lay much nearer my heart,—his treatment of his son Frank.

I looked about me wondering if there could be any place to which the person who had held the gun could have contrived to flee and conceal himself, before Frank arrived on the spot. But there seemed no possible opportunity for any one to have done so. It was simply a little green glade where I stood. A few rods above and around it was a grove of slender trees of young growth, filled in with thick bushes and underbrush, where one might indeed be able to hide, but Frank had come through it from one side, and Mr. Sinclair and Madge from another, too quickly to render it at all probable that the guilty one could have succeeded in reaching its shelter in season to avoid discovery. Below me, through a narrow fringe of trees, lay the hillside where the horse had been feeding, with the garden still farther down the slope.

On the opposite side of the little clearing, a

few yards from where I stood, was something which seemed like a great crack in the earth, a sort of ravine or gorge deepened and hollowed out at some former time by the action of running water. As I walked over to it I could see that it might be a dozen feet wide and half as many in depth, though it was so filled in with bushes and plants, stones and rubbish, that it was impossible to see in most places that it had any bottom at all. It ran along the edge of the clearing and on up the hill among the trees, where it was lost to view.

I wondered if it had been possible for the culprit to fly to this hiding-place and conceal himself among the underbrush, before the others could reach the spot. I decided that it was possible but hardly probable, for in the first place it seemed as if no one would have thought of it, since it fell away so suddenly from the level ground of the glade as to be quite invisible from the spot where the accident occurred. Moreover, it was such a wild growth of bushes and vines, mixed in with rough and jagged stones, and with dead branches sticking out in all directions, that I did not see how any one could have obtained foothold long enough to get down there, even if he had thought of it. Still less could I conceive how one could have clambered out again if he had managed to get down into it. Besides, it seemed the home of snakes

and lizards and all sorts of creeping creatures, and I could not imagine Philip—upon whom my mind would dwell in spite of myself—as daring to attempt to enter such a place.

As I stood looking down into it, my eye fell on a bunch of pink tissue paper tied about with a bit of twine, which lay tangled in among the twigs and leaves of one of the highest bushes midway across the ravine. It looked fresh and clean, as if it had lately fallen, and I wondered idly for a moment how it chanced to be there, but it told me nothing, and I walked away feeling more hopeless than before.

As they all said, it could have been no other than Frank, and yet I knew in my heart that it was not Frank.

Frank was not at the breakfast-table, nor was anything said concerning his absence. Mr. Sinclair ate in silence, and though the rest of us ventured a remark now and then, it was in a half-hearted way, and everybody seemed under a cloud. Philip and Ralph looked embarrassed and unhappy, and for the first time since I had known them, had nothing to say. It was hardly to be wondered at, however, when their elders were, one and all, ill at ease, anxious and utterly unlike themselves.

Immediately after the meal was ended, I saw Henry with a tray of food ascending the stairs, and became aware that Frank was to have his

breakfast in his own room, but whether because he was ill or for some other reason, I could not discover.

An hour later, Madge came to my room, and told me, in her confiding way, how unhappy they were all feeling about her brother Frank, how he still adhered to his first statement that he had not shot the horse, in spite of his father's promise that he would forgive him if he would confess his wrong-doing and try to be a better boy in future. When asked if he knew who had done it, if he had not, he grew sullen and refused to say anything. His father had thereupon again punished him severely, and left him to himself, feeling that it was useless to try to do anything more with him.

At dinner-time his father sent for him to take his place at the table as usual, and presently he came in, looking as he did in the days when I first knew him. The old sullen frown had come back, and he glanced neither to the right nor the left as, with a sharply drawn breath, he slipped into his seat beside me.

His face showed the marks of heavy weeping, and he looked tired and worn with suffering, as I had never seen a child look before. But as he sat there, I saw his hand clench and a determined look come about his lips, as if he said, "They shall not know that I am suffering."

Nobody paid any attention to him, and pres-

ently, while the others were talking, I ventured to place my hand on his arm and speak a kind word in his ear, but he drew away from me as if my touch had burnt him, turned his back to me as much as possible and made not the slightest answer to my remark. Indeed, he was the old Frank come back again, and the little friend I had grown to love so dearly had utterly vanished.

Could it be that the others were right, and that I had been mistaken in the child's character after all?

As I turned away I caught Mrs. Archer's gaze upon me. There was a half-triumphant smile upon her lips, as if to say: "What do you think of your young hero now?" It pained and saddened me. I finished my dinner in silence and escaped to my chamber as soon as possible.

It was probably an hour or two afterward that, as I sat at my window, I became conscious of two little forms crouched on the ground in an angle formed by the barn and an adjoining shed, at no great distance away. It was Frank sitting there, with Laddie, as usual, for his companion.

It was a time when no one was apt to be about, for the ladies were usually in their rooms at this hour and the men far away in the fields. He had probably expected to meet no one and had ventured out of his room for a breath of fresh air.

But presently his solitude was broken, for Philip and Ralph appeared and passed within a few feet of him. They did not speak, but I could see that they looked at him curiously as they walked by.

Frank, on his part, took no notice of them, and did not even change his position. In a few moments, drawn by an attraction which they could not resist, they retraced their steps and passed by again, still regarding him fixedly, but saying nothing.

Suddenly, Frank started up before them with his face flushed and his form proud and erect. His voice rang out loud and clear and I heard every word.

"Yes," he said, "I know what you want, Philip. I know what you want. You want to know how it felt when the whip came down. And I will tell you. It hurt me horribly, Philip," and I heard his voice quiver. "The blows were hard to bear and my father's cruel words were harder yet, but I'd go through it all again—yes, ten times over—before, for one moment, I'd be *you*, or *you!*" And he held his arm out straight and pointed with his finger at Philip and then at Ralph.

The two boys hung their heads and crept away like whipped dogs, while Frank stood with his head held high and a proud scorn upon his face, as he watched them out of his sight.

Then I knew who had shot the horse.

CHAPTER XIV

THE OLD MINE

THE days passed, and though I tried often to find Frank, in the hope of renewing our old friendship, I met with no success. He shunned me as he shunned every one else. If I spoke to him at the table he either scowled, pretending not to hear, or answered so shortly and sullenly as to leave me no encouragement to make further advances.

All the gentle kindliness of manner, the pleasant smile which had learned to find its way to his lips, the shy interest with which he had occasionally listened to the conversation of those around him, were gone now, and in their place was left merely the listless, apathetic boy with the gloomy eyes and sullen mouth, whom I had known two months before.

There was no need now to watch, as I had sometimes lately done, for the sudden gleam of interest in the father's eyes, when they chanced occasionally to fall upon his son's face. Poor Frank had shut himself up into his old dull, heavy shell again, and all my fine dreams of a better understanding between his father and him, which I had so longed to see realized, were shattered.

Mr. Sinclair never spoke to him, or even glanced toward him, nor did any other member of the household, so far as I could see. Even Ralph, with whom he had lately been on such friendly terms, seemed quite estranged now, and the two took no more notice of each other than if they had never met. Frank was left completely to himself, and came and went as he chose without let or hindrance from anybody. No one knew, and no one cared, where he was from morning till night, if only he were home at meal-times and when the hour for bed arrived.

I say nobody cared, but I, at least, went about sad and unhappy in these days which were so dark to my little friend. I would have given much to be able to lift, even in some slight degree, the heavy cloud which seemed to settle about him, but all my efforts to bring about a meeting were rendered unavailing by his determination to keep beyond my reach. Now and then I would catch a glimpse of him in some path or crossing the lawn, but he was always walking hurriedly, as if anxious to avoid observation and escape to his beloved woods as quickly as possible.

Generally he was alone, except for Laddie, who never left him, but several times the two were with "Uncle Jone," trudging along by his side, as if thankful for that companionship at least. The old man looked kind and as if he would be a

friend to the lonely boy in his hour of need. I hoped that his kindness might some time be returned to him in tenfold measure.

At last, however, there came a day when I met my little fugitive face to face in a broad path in the woods, where he could not well escape, though even then he would have tried to hurry past had I not quickly caught him by the hand and held him fast.

"O Frank," I cried, "don't run away from me, my dear. Why will you no longer let me be your friend? Don't you know how I grieve with you, how sorry I feel that all this trouble has come upon you?"

Frank's face reddened, as he held his head down, and I understood him to say something about not wanting anybody to be sorry for him.

"Is it because you think everybody is against you, my dear, that you don't want to speak to me? Don't you know that I believe you innocent, Frank? I have never thought you shot the horse. Always, since I heard that you said you had not done it, I have felt sure it was not you. I know that if it had been, you would have confessed it like the brave, truthful boy you are, and when you denied it I knew that it was not you. Did you think that your old friend was against you too, my dear?"

Frank, who had ceased to try to pull away his hand, glanced up into my face with great tears

welling in his eyes and his lips quivering. "I thought you felt just like all the rest about it," he said, and suddenly his voice broke and he put his face against my arm in his old way and began to sob.

"But, my dear, I never did feel like the rest, and now that you know it, come and sit down with me on this log, and I will comfort you and help you all I can to bear it. You shall tell me all about it"——

But here, Frank, who at first seemed willing to let me lead him to the seat, suddenly drew back again. "No, no, no!" he cried. "I cannot, I cannot, Miss Agatha."

Snatching his hand from mine, he rushed away, stumbling as he went, but never stopping till he was far below me down the hillside.

It was very strange. He had longed for my sympathy and had meant to let me comfort him, I was sure, but some sudden, painful thought had come to him and he had fled away to bear his burden all alone once more and to brood in silence over the grief which he knew at last that his old friend wished to share. I could not understand it and felt more unhappy about my little lad than I had ever done before.

But Frank was not the only one whose behavior was changed and unnatural. It was strange to see how unlike themselves both Philip and Ralph appeared about this time. Ever since the

morning when I had seen the three boys together, when Frank had hurled his scornful words at them and they had hung their heads and slunk away, they had seemed to dwell apart. Formerly they had been always together, and wherever Philip's pretty striped cap could be seen darting in and out among the trees, there, flying after it, was the well-worn old straw hat with its fringe of fiery hue which no one could have failed to recognize as belonging to "Little Redhead."

But now all was changed. They wandered about the grounds apart, miserable and forlorn. Once or twice, it is true, I saw them talking together, but it was evidently in anger, for their faces were both clouded with heavy frowns and their tones were loud and defiant, though I did not distinguish words. Whether the other members of the household had begun to take note of this gloomy state of affairs between the two boys, who but a little while before had been such loving comrades, I never knew, for about this time something of such an appalling nature transpired that all these trivial matters were sent far, far from our minds.

It must have been two or three days after the brief interview with Frank which I have just recorded, that we elders were gathered upon the lawn, late in the afternoon, waiting for the supper-hour to arrive. There had been a heavy shower off behind "Old Bald Top," our favorite

mountain, the one which sloped so gently down to the lawn and garden and formed the southern boundary of the farm.

We had been watching the dense black clouds which had overhung the mountain's brow for an hour or more, roll away, leaving that part of the sky as bright and clear as the blue above our own heads.

Suddenly down one of the paths which extended from the base far up among the heights of this very mountain, we perceived human forms hurrying along with headlong speed. As they drew nearer we could distinguish them, and saw their faces wild with terror. There were two men, Uncle Jone and another servant, Philip, Ralph, the boy from the hotel called Tom Murray and his younger brother. Instinctively every one of us sped up the path to meet the frightened men and boys.

What could it be that had brought that look of terror to their faces? Presently Philip pressed on before the others, fairly flying down the path, and flung himself against his father.

"Father, Frank is drowned!" he screamed. "My brother Frank is drowned! I shall never see my brother again!"

Spent with grief and fright, the boy would have fallen, had not his father caught him in his arms.

"Philip," he exclaimed, "what do you mean?

What has happened?" But Philip was sobbing so violently he could say no more. Something was wrong about Frank. That was all we could make out at first.

"What has happened?" demanded Mr. Sinclair.

"Father, he's drowned," sobbed Philip.

"Hush, child! Are you crazy? How could he drown when there is no water within miles of us? You tell me what has happened," he said sharply to Uncle Jone.

"Yes, sir," said the old man obediently. The tears were streaming down his cheeks and his trembling hands were raised, as he burst out:

"Sir, I doan' know how ter say de words, but de chile am gone. He's done drown in de ole mine, an' I cayn't make it no diff'unt, do what I may."

I cannot tell what others did at this point. For myself, I was overcome with horror and dismay, with grief and yet with unbelief that such a dreadful thing could happen. My little lad! Was this the end of everything? I seemed to see the trees all swimming around me and felt the ground sinking beneath my feet. But presently I was listening again to the voices. Uncle Jone was telling what had happened.

"I went back down, sir, as soon as I could, but de water was dar, eight or ten feet 'bove whar he'd stood, an' no boy an' no dog dar, sir. He

done gone, sir, an' if my prayers 'ud bring him back he'd be here now. I cayn't say no mo', 'deed I cayn't."

I saw the old man put his hands before his face and heard him sob.

"It cannot be!" exclaimed Mr. Sinclair. Through my own grief I saw that the man looked dazed.

"My son Frank! My Helen's boy!" he cried. All at once the father seemed to wake within him. "He is my son," he cried sharply. "Come, show me the place." He started up the mountain path followed by a little crowd of people who had gathered around I knew not when nor how.

They were gone now, men, women and children, leaving me alone, trembling and weeping, saying to myself that it could not be, that this must not be!

Presently I became aware that Uncle Jone stood near me. He had not gone with the others. "Whar's de use ter go," he said; "de chile's done gone." He, too, was weeping. "I lubbed de boy, I did, miss," he cried. "Nubbuddy could help lubbin' dat little castaway dat knowed him as he was. Po' mudderless an' faderless lamb!"

"Tell me about it, uncle," I said, when I could speak.

"Yes, miss, dat I will. You an' me was his

frien's, an' all de frien's, 'pears like, dat he had in de whole worl', po' boy ! "

Then Uncle Jone went on to relate what had happened. I can tell it calmly enough now, but it was hard to listen then. It seemed that Uncle Jone, months before, had dropped an ax, with which he had been chopping wood, down the mouth of the old abandoned mine, which lay half a mile away along the slope of the mountain. I had never been there, but in one of our earlier walks Frank had once pointed out the path leading to it. On this afternoon Uncle Jone, in company with one of the field-hands, had gone to this place for the purpose of recovering the ax.

There was still an old windlass there and a large bucket and rope, by which strangers who might occasionally wish to visit the mine, went down the shaft.

Inasmuch as he was the lighter as well as the older of the two, it was Uncle Jone's intention to get into this bucket and be let down by the stronger man. As he was about to step into it, Frank happened to come up and asked Uncle Jone if he might not go too.

The good-natured old man told him to jump in, and Frank climbed over the side of the bucket and nestled down happily by Uncle Jone's side. Then Laddie whined to follow his master, and Uncle Jone consented to take a third passenger also.

All went well. Uncle Jone had a candle with him, and when they reached the bottom of the shaft, he and Frank began to hunt for the ax. They had just discovered it among some dead leaves and rubbish, when they heard Philip and Ralph above, begging Uncle Jone to let them come down, too, and see the mine. Uncle Jone thought there could be no harm in granting their wishes, so he told them to wait till he came up and then he would let them down. He took his ax, got into the bucket and was drawn up, leaving the candle with Frank, who wished to stay a while longer and be drawn up with the other boys.

When Uncle Jone arrived at the top, he found not only Philip and Ralph there, but Tom Murray and his brother also. As they all wished to visit the mine, Uncle Jone and the other man let them down, two at a time, bidding them to be careful not to get hurt in any way, and to be ready to come up when he called them.

The boys amused themselves by "exploring" among the leaves and rubbish lying about, and then wandered a little way into one of the level, horizontal shafts which branched out from the bottom where they had landed. Presently the men above heard them shouting:

"Oh, let us up quick, Uncle Jone; the mine's all filling up with water."

At first Uncle Jone thought the boys were

joking, but all at once he remembered that it had been raining heavily behind the hills, and he had heard how such a sudden shower had been known to flood the mine, probably by means of some unknown fissure through the rocks. Full of horror at this thought he called down to the boys to tell him where the water was.

They answered that it was pouring in through the long horizontal shaft where they had been exploring. They had run back as fast as they could, ahead of it, but now it had reached the spot where they were standing grouped together about the bucket and was already over their shoes.

"Draw us up right away, Uncle Jone," they begged.

Uncle Jone had to think quickly. He told them they could not all come up at once, as the bucket was not large enough, but that the three smallest boys must get in first. He would draw them up, and then send the bucket down for the other two.

But when the bucket came up, four boys were in it, holding to the sides and to each other as best they could, and Frank was not with them. When Uncle Jone came to this part of his story he burst into tears, and said:

"I nebba waited fer a word, miss. I counted heads, an' den I got inter de bucket an' Sam let me down. I went in fear an' tremblin', hopin'

an' prayin' I 'd fin' de chile, but de muddy, yaller water was all up de sides ob de shaf', an' no sign ob boy or dog, eider. I knowed he was gone, but I jes' could n't hab it so, an' I got up out'n de bucket an' held onter de side ob it as well as I could, an' felt wid my feet all about in de water. But it was jes' like a deep well. Dar wa' n't no bottom to it, an' den I knowed Frank was gone. De water kep' comin' in all de time higher an' higher, so I had ter git back inter de bucket an' be drawed up."

The boys had been eager to tell Uncle Jone how it had happened that Frank was left behind. The three smallest boys were Ralph, Frank and the youngest Murray boy. When, in obedience to Uncle Jone's call, they had climbed into the bucket, it was found that the water was coming so fast that it would not be safe to wait for the bucket to go up and be sent down again. Yet it was too small to carry them all. Even by holding to the sides there was no possibility that they would reach the top without the risk of falling back into the water, or at least they had believed so. Tom Murray had crowded his way into the bucket, but Philip remained outside in an agony of fright and horror, screaming in anguish that he could not be left, begging the boys to save him, imploring them to make room for him, not to leave him there to die.

Then Frank had called to him. "Philip, you

shall have my place. I 'm coming, Philip." And in some way, though wedged in among the boys, he had managed to scramble out of the bucket, with Laddie jumping after him. He went up to where Philip stood, put both arms round him and said: "Philip, you are the one my father loves. You shall go and I will stay."

Then he had pushed him toward the bucket. Philip had climbed in, the word was given and the bucket was drawn up.

Uncle Jone, when he came to this point in his story, said the boys were all crying and sobbing as they told him how they could never forget the look on Frank's face as the bucket went up and they looked down upon him where he stood with his feet firmly planted and Laddie clasped in his arms. The light from the candle, where it had been placed in a niche of the rock, fell full upon his upturned face, and there was the strangest, sweetest expression on it as he called out,

"Philip, tell my father good-bye for me." Then they had passed up out of his sight.

How long I sat in that quiet spot, I cannot tell. The sun went down, the stars came out, but still I lingered alone with my grief for the child of my heart. Uncle Jone, restless and miserable, had long since left me.

"Dar 's no use, miss," he said, "but 'pears like I cayn't gib de chile up."

"Uncle Jone," I said, "will you tell my dear

boy's father just what you have told me,—what the boys said about his last words to Philip, and his message to his father?"

"'Deed, dat I will, miss. I'll do it de bery fus' ting I sees him."

For I felt that Frank's father *must* learn something at last of the noble, loving nature he had never known.

Oh, how could that little life be broken off just here! Of what use all the struggles and longings and hopes and fears that sensitive heart had known if this was the end of all? But even as I asked the question in my helplessness, there came over me a strange feeling of peace. What were those words which suddenly stood forth from some dim corner of my memory?

——"round our restlessness His rest."

Why need my heart be troubled? Whether the child were here or there, what matter? He was in his Father's hand. Surely it was well with Frank.

So I walked home under the stars, feeling strangely comforted.

CHAPTER XV

PHILIP'S REPENTANCE

WHEN I drew near the steps of the porch, I saw Mr. Sinclair seated on one of the benches in the shadow of the house. He was alone, and his face was hidden in his hands. I wondered if Uncle Jone had already told him of Frank's good-bye, and, if so, what thoughts the loving message had called forth in the father's mind. But it was not for me to pry into the secrets of the proud man's heart, and I would have hastened past him, had not my steps been suddenly arrested.

Just as I reached the lowest step, Philip rushed down the stairway, through the hall and out upon the porch.

"Father," he cried, "I can't go to bed till I've spoken to you. I must tell you everything."

He stood before his father in his nightgown, trembling, frightened, his nerves wrought up to the highest pitch. "I must, I must!" he exclaimed. "I'm afraid to go to sleep without Frank till I've told every word."

He hurried the words out as fast as he could speak. The tears were streaming down his

cheeks and his hands were clenched. Mrs. Archer now appeared in the doorway looking anxious and excited.

"Francis," she said, "I cannot prevail upon the child to go to bed till he has seen you. He is wild with fright."

Mr. Sinclair had already risen, and now he would have lifted Philip in his arms tenderly and soothingly; but Philip exclaimed,

"No, father, you 'll never love me any more when I 've told you. But I must do it. Oh, father, you 've thought Frank killed the horse, and it was n't Frank at all. I killed it. And I lied when I said I did n't touch the gun. I went to your room and got it, and the shells, too, and Tom and Ralph and I played with it up there above the garden, and it was in my hands when it went off. I lied, lied, lied! And I let my brother Frank be whipped because I 'm a coward and can't bear to be hurt. And it is n't the first time, either. He 's always been punished for me. I 've lied out of things because I could n't stand it to be whipped, and many a time he 's stood it for me. He never was bad in his life, but you all thought so, and I let you, because I liked to have you all praise me and say what a nice boy I was. And now you know what a nice boy I am! Oh, my brother 's gone, and I never knew I cared anything about him till now! He 's thrown away his life for me, and I do n't deserve it. He was

always the brave one, and I was the coward, though nobody knew it. I just hated myself because I could n't be brave. I wanted to be, but I could n't, and so I 've always pretended to everybody that I was.

"And when I 've told those big stories about the wonderful things I 've done, there has n't been a word of truth in them, father. You and Aunt Margaret have been pleased with me and praised me when I did n't deserve it at all. When I told you I killed the snake that was going to bite Johnny Todd, I lied; it was Frank who killed it. And when I told you I went out on the log and saved Laddie, it was my own brave brother Frank who did it, when not another one of us boys dared do it. Lots of times at home, when I 've told you of things I 've done, I have n't done 'em at all. It 's been Frank or some other boy. I 've said it just because I liked to see how pleased you all were and because I wished I dared do such things, and so I pretended I did. Frank 's borne everything for me, and kept me from being afraid at night, too, when nobody else in the world has known how it scares me to be in the dark, just like a girl. I never meant to tell anybody. He and I meant to fight it out together. But now he 's gone, and I never can live without him."

Here Philip burst into a storm of sobs, and Mrs. Archer, who had been trying to interrupt

the torrent of words, now said anxiously and imploringly:

"Francis, stop him! The child is fairly insane with grief and nervousness. It is dreadful to have him under such a delusion. Of course he never killed the horse, and he has never done any of those things. Try to get him to come to bed"——

"Yes, I did kill the horse, too, Aunt Margaret," broke in Philip, "and I'll tell you exactly how it was. We did start to go to the hotel that day with Tom, just as you saw us, and he had his kite, flying it; but on the way up the kite came down in the woods on Old Bald Top, and we had to go over there after it. It landed in some bushes in that ravine there, and Tom had to jump down and pull it out, and he got it all but part of the tail.

"Then we stayed round there a while, and somehow, we began to talk about guns. Tom wanted me to go up to your room and get your gun. I did n't want to, and he said I was afraid to for fear I'd be whipped, and that made me so mad that I went straight up there and got it, and some cartridges, too, that were on the table. I knew you were n't there, for I'd seen you go off with Madge, and I knew all the rest of the folks would be taking naps in their rooms then. So I went back with the gun to Tom and Ralph, and while we were playing with it, Frank came up

the path, and he saw we had it. He came round to me and whispered to me to go and put it back, because he knew, and I knew, that you would n't like it. But I would n't, and said something hateful to him, and we went off down the hill away from him.

"Then Tom loaded it, and he wanted to shoot at a target he had set up, but I wanted to shoot first, and I snatched it away, and it went off. Then we saw the horse fall, down below us on the grass. We dropped the gun, and we did n't know what to do, but just as quick as lightning Tom said, 'Come with me,' and he ran a few steps to the ravine, and we after him. He got down and pulled us down, and we crept under the brush and did n't dare to stir. And in a minute we heard the folks come. We heard all they said. We heard you ask Frank who did it, and Frank said he did n't know and he did n't want to know. And so he did n't really know, but he thought it must have been one of us, and he was afraid it was me, and he did n't want to tell on me. Oh, it 's all true, Aunt Margaret, and I 'm not crazy. I 'm telling the truth for once in my life"——

"Philip," exclaimed his father, "do you want to break my heart? Can this be you?"

"Yes, father, I 'm Philip," said the boy, weeping bitterly.

"Brother, tell him to come with me," implored

Mrs. Archer. "He is beside himself and does not know what he says."

Now, my friends, what can you think of me, that I stood at the bottom of the steps in the shadow and heard all this? Of course the thing I ought to have done was to ascend the steps, and, looking neither to the right nor the left, go quickly to my room, without hearing a word more than I was obliged to hear on my way. But there is this excuse for me, that I was at first so startled by Philip's appearance in the doorway and his wild movements, that my steps were arrested in spite of myself. And as the fiery words rushed from his lips, my astonishment, when I took in their meaning, was so great that I was still further paralyzed for the time being. It was natural that I should listen with devouring interest to what the child was saying of Frank whom I had so dearly loved; but now that he had come to a pause I felt that I must no longer linger.

Therefore, I quietly and quickly went up the steps and tried to cross the floor of the porch. But Philip saw me.

"There is Miss Agatha," he said, running to me and catching hold of my skirt. "She knows about the snake, for she saw Frank kill it that day, and heard me say I did it. I hated her for it then, but I don't now. It 's me that everybody will hate now."

"Francis, if you will not take the child to bed I cannot help it. I shall remain here no longer," said Mrs. Archer; and she turned away and walked into the house.

"I can do nothing now," said poor Mr. Sinclair, spreading his hands helplessly. He spoke brokenly, and his face was haggard and drawn. "I must be by myself," he said. "Miss Agatha, will you care for him a little while? I will come later."

He started down the steps and disappeared round the house, leaving Philip weeping by my side.

I turned and took the boy into my arms and held him close.

"Philip," I said, trembling, "let me tell you something. *Now* I love you. You have sometimes thought I did not care for you as the others did. But now I do. And do you know why, my dear? It is because now you are the Philip I have wanted you to be. Now you are Philip, noble and true. You have torn away all that false pride, all that wretched tangle of falsehood that I hated to see about you, and here instead is the real Philip as you were meant to be, honest, truthful, brave; because it was brave to stand before your father and confess to him what you did just now. Though my heart ached for you in your trouble, which is mine as well as yours, yet I was proud, proud to see how all the wicked

deceit and hateful pride were trampled down, how your own better nature had triumphed at last. Come, dear, come with me to your own room, and let us talk it over together, and I will try to comfort you."

The child, still weeping and trembling with excitement, lifted his head from my shoulder where I had placed it and said sadly:

"But father, Miss Agatha. My father will will never forgive me. He will never even speak to me again."

"Yes, yes, indeed, my child, he will. And he will love you, too. Do now just as you know he would have you do. Presently he will come back. Let him find you in your bed, and I will sit beside you there. You shall tell me what is in your heart, and I will help you all I can."

Then he let me lead him to his room, and I sat by his bedside while he held my hand between both his own hot, feverish palms, as if he feared I might escape.

"Oh, stay with me, good Miss Agatha," he implored. "I can't stay alone without Frank. Oh, where is my brother now?"

Then he burst into such wild sobs again that it was long before I could soothe him or even make him listen to the words of comfort I tried to pour into his ear.

But gradually he grew more quiet, and though I let him talk—for his flushed face and bright,

startled eyes told plainly how far sleep was from his pillow—he spoke less excitedly, and after a little time became calmer, though still a trembling sob, now and then, showed the nervous strain under which the poor boy labored.

"O Miss Agatha," he said, "I never knew how much I cared for Frank till now that I've lost him. I don't think I knew I cared about him at all. I always thought of him as just Frank; Frank who would be on hand to do things for me when I wanted 'em done, and to help me learn my pieces and that sort of thing, and to stay with me when I was afraid. Oh, he was always good to me and ready to do anything in the world for me! But I never was good to him, never. I never tried to help him, and I did n't care what became of him if only I had a good time myself. Time and again when Aunt Margaret scolded him I knew he did n't deserve it, but I never said a word to help him. All I cared for was just to keep straight with everybody myself. To think of the times I've let him be whipped instead of me! But this horse business was the worst of anything. There was never anything so bad as that. I have felt like sinking into the ground about it all along. How could I let my brother be punished for that! Yet it seemed as if I could n't tell anybody about it, and I knew Frank would n't. Ralph Todd was at me all the time to tell, for he 's just hated

me ever since it happened. He was so ashamed to let Frank bear it all. I told Ralph he could n't be so mean as to break his promise to me to keep still about it, and he did n't break it, but he 's just despised me for not telling and not a bit more than I have despised myself. I longed to tell, but somehow I could n't. It seemed too dreadful. But I could let Frank bear it all.

"And now he 's gone! I never can tell him now how I feel about it all. I can't tell him that there never was any one I loved as I did him, though I did n't know it till now. What can I do without him? Oh, if he could only come back I 'd show him what a different brother I 'd be!"

Thus the poor child rambled on. I tried to comfort him and to soothe his quivering nerves. Some time, when the right opportunity should come, I hoped to show the dear boy, as gently as I could, some of the sad mistakes of his past, and with tender words of counsel point the way to a better and happier future, but that time was not now. Now my one thought was to quiet him so that sleep might calm the overexcited brain. Gradually I succeeded. After a while nature asserted her rights, and I could see the eyelids close slowly, growing heavier as each moment passed on.

We were quiet now, though he still held my

hand tightly clasped in his. Just as I thought he was at last asleep, his father came quietly to the door and looked in on us. Philip started up.

"Father, is it you?" he cried wildly.

Mr. Sinclair hastened to his side. "Yes, my boy," he said, gently.

His face had changed in those brief hours. He looked grief-stricken and as if years had passed over his head since I had last seen him. But he tried to smile upon the anxious face of his boy, as he bent to let Philip clasp him about the neck. He drew the trembling boy into his arms.

"You are all the son I have now, Philip," he said brokenly. "My other son, whom I never knew till now"——

Here he hid his face in Philip's neck, and I heard the strong man sob.

"O father, don't feel so! Forgive me!" cried Philip.

"I do, I do forgive you, Philip," said his father, lifting his head. "But for myself, can I ever forgive myself?—blind, blind that I have been!" Then he kissed his son and hastily left the room.

I still sat on in my old place, trying to soothe poor Philip, who had been thoroughly roused by his father's visit. Finally he dropped into an uneasy sleep. But even then I could not leave him, for his hand still held mine, and with every movement I made his clasp would tighten.

Twice, as I sat there, his aunt appeared in the doorway, but when she saw me she silently turned away.

I knew that she must resent my presence at such a time and that she must think I had rudely thrust myself into family matters with which I could have no possible concern, and this knowledge did not tend to allay the discomfort and embarrassment, to say nothing of the grief, in which I passed the long hours of the night at Philip's bedside.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW LADDIE SAVED A PRECIOUS LIFE

It was not until a few, faint gleams of dawning light from over the mountain's top stole into the bedroom window, that I found myself at liberty to leave my little patient. He had fallen now into a quiet, dreamless slumber, in which his troubles were for the time forgotten. His hands, clasped upon his breast, rose and fell gently with his soft, regular breathing, and the cool, moist forehead, the faint flush on his cheek, showed that nature had taken him into her own hands at last, and was soothing him in her own healthful way.

There was no longer any need to fear the illness from feverish excitement which I had dreaded. Nor was there any danger of his being frightened by awaking in the dark, for it would soon be broad daylight. I knew that no medicine could do for Philip what that soft, dewy slumber, hushing all the painful thoughts and soothing all the quivering nerves, was doing now. Therefore with one last glance at the boy's face, more beautiful in his quiet sleep than I had ever seen it, I stole gently out of the room and hastened to my own chamber.

But not to sleep! For my own overwrought nerves there could be no such rest at present. I felt the necessity of action of some sort. Hastily drawing aside the curtain I looked from my open window out upon the quiet lawn.

The grim mountains stood all about it, still clothed in their night shadows, but in the east I could see the dawn brightening, and even as I gazed, the somber trees took on the faintest tints of their daylight colors, the light broadened, a cloud just tipped with softest rose color appeared above Mount Eyre's crest, and then in a moment I became aware that a new day had begun.

"I will go out to meet the rising sun," I said to myself, and putting on hat and cape, stole softly down the stairs and out of the door.

It was still very early. No sign of life inside the house or out of it was visible, as I hastened across the lawn. Whether the rest of the household had forgotten grief in slumber, I could not tell; but for me there seemed no solace save in active movement. Therefore I hastened on with rapid, though aimless, steps which led me up the path I had so often trod, the path through the garden and up the gentle slope of Old Bald Top.

I meant to hurry on to see the sun rise from a certain lofty height where once, together, Frank and I had watched the sight, but on the way I came to the place where, a little while before, the accident had happened which had brought so

much grief and suffering to my poor, lost Frank. I paused upon the very spot where the boys had stood when the fatal shot had been fired, and went over again in my mind the sad details of Philip's story to his father the night before. Then I wandered along the edge of the narrow gorge where he had said they plunged down to hide from their pursuers.

Now that I knew the story, I could see that it had been possible for them to do so, though before it had seemed that no one could have ventured into such a maze of tangled brier and brush. I even thought I could detect the spot where they had rushed down and carried stones and earth with them in their mad haste. Yes, and there, still clinging to the bushes, midway across the gorge, was the bit of string and the paper which had helped to form the kite's tail.

It was all as Philip had said. Oh, if it could only have been said before! If only my little lad need not have had all that weight of unmerited blame to bear! But with what unflinching, silent bravery he had borne it! My eyes were blinded by heavy tears as I turned to walk along the border of the ravine on my upward journey.

Suddenly I was startled by a familiar sound. Could it be possible that that was Laddie's bark which I heard, sharp and quick, and coming nearer and nearer? Was that Laddie, who had

been left with Frank, that I saw rushing down the sloping side of the gorge to meet me?

Indeed, it was Laddie. I stopped short in the path, trembling so that I could scarcely stand, and the dog came and leaped upon me with short, quick yelps of joy or anguish, I could not tell which. His eyes looked into mine as if imploring me to understand and help him.

"Oh, what is it, Laddie?" I found myself saying, as if he had been human.

Suddenly he seized my skirt in his teeth and tried to draw me forward, then ran on ahead a little way, flying back with the same fierce, frantic yelps and looking into my face with the old entreaty.

"Oh, it is Frank!" I cried, as all at once the thought flashed upon me what Laddie wanted. "Frank! Frank!" I cried, and started along the path.

Again Laddie barked and led the way, looking back to see if I understood. He plunged down into that very ravine among all the brush, at a point a few rods higher than where I had been standing.

I could not follow him, but stood trembling on the bank, in a maze of anxiety. Up he came again and took hold of my skirt to drag me down.

"O Laddie," I cried, "try to understand me. I cannot go. But let us hurry home and get the others. They will go and find dear Frank."

If I had never thought before that dogs know what we say to them I shall always feel sure of it hereafter; for Laddie, with just a moment's pause for thought, suddenly started down the hill for home, never looking behind him but yelping for me to follow, all eagerness to reach the house.

How we got over the ground I never knew. The next thing I was conscious of was that I stood before Mr. Sinclair's window, with Laddie barking wildly by my side. I was shouting with all my might.

"Come, everybody! Here is Laddie! He wants us to go to Frank. Oh, come!"

A dozen sashes flew up, but I only paid heed to one. "Come, Mr. Sinclair," I said, as his head appeared at the window. "See, here is Laddie. Oh, come to Frank! Laddie will take us."

Laddie fairly howled in his anxiety to make himself heard. It seemed as if the little fellow knew all that I said and meant to emphasize every word of it.

In the briefest possible time Mr. Sinclair, then John Dale and a dozen black people stood about us, with Laddie leaping among them and rushing ahead to lead the way.

Swiftly they followed up the hill, Laddie looking back again and again, still yelping with excitement. I went too. What else could I do? And behind me came the rest of the rudely

awakened household, as one after another they hurried forth from their chambers.

When we reached the spot where Laddie had first appeared, there was no sign of anybody near, but we could see where the little crowd of anxious men had torn through the tangled brush of the ravine as if it had been the merest thistle-down in their pathway, so eagerly and unthinkingly had they sped through it on their way after Laddie.

How long we anxious women stood grouped together in that lonely spot I cannot tell. It seemed to us like hours. "Oh, if Laddie meant anything, why don't they come?" cried Madge, trembling between hope and dread. "Oh, what did Laddie mean?"

She started up the hill, crying that she must do something, that she must try to find them, and left us still standing on the edge of the ravine, with our eyes strained on the bend where the men had disappeared from our view.

It could not have been long after that when one of us exclaimed, "Oh, there is Madge! Look! She is beckoning to us."

What had she discovered? Could it be that they were coming at last?

We climbed the path as quickly as we could, and Madge came down part way to meet us.

"Oh," she said, "I saw them. They were coming along through the gorge very slowly,

and, oh, it seemed to me they were carrying something among them. Can it be that it was Frank?" she asked, in an awed tone. Her face was pale, and she trembled. "Then I lost them," she went on. "I think they must have climbed up on the bank among the trees. But I heard Laddie bark. Oh, listen! I hear him again."

Yes, we all heard him now. The sound came nearer. Surely they must be coming. Laddie's quick, excited yelps fell sharper on our ears. What did they foretell? Could it be that Frank was found?

We stood in breathless waiting. The sound grew louder, and presently Laddie sprang through the bushes into the path above us. He rushed down to us frantically, leaping upon one and another, as if in his joy he were quite beside himself. Then he flew back again up the hill, and we followed quickly.

Just as we reached a steep rise we saw the men coming. They were creeping slowly and carefully along. In the center of the group, three or four, with bent heads and outstretched arms, were bearing a limp little form, about which Laddie capered joyously. But the little form was motionless. There was no sign of life about the limbs, and the white face, as it came nearer, was still. It was Frank, indeed, but how had he come back to us? I fell into a sudden trembling and sank by the wayside. I had not

Watching the little procession approach

known before how high my hopes had been raised by Laddie's strange return and stranger behavior.

But all at once I started up again, for I heard Mr. Sinclair's voice ringing out firm and clear. There was an exultant thrill in it which I can never forget.

"He is found!" he cried, "my son is found! And he lives! Thank God, he lives!"

Ah, was not that cry enough to give me back my strength? In a moment I stood beside my dear boy's side. I saw that though the face was white as death he still breathed, and now, as we gathered about him, he moved slightly and moaned.

"We must not stop, we must get him home," cried Mr. Sinclair, still in those ringing tones.

"Oh, father, he looks so white," exclaimed Madge, appalled. "Is it death?"

"No," declared her father, "he will live. The doctor will soon be here. He is only in a stupor. He must live; I cannot lose him now."

We carried our boy down the mountainside and into the house, on up the stairs, and would have laid him on his own bed beside his sleeping brother had not his father exclaimed:

"To my own room. Take him there. I must have him with me."

Then, when we had placed the small, unconscious form on the bed, we flew, one for this

restorative, and one for that. One fell to rubbing the helpless limbs, another fanned the face which lay like marble upon the pillow, while all looked and longed for the first faint signs of returning consciousness.

How anxiously we waited for the doctor's coming, and prayed that it might not be long delayed! With what a sigh of relief did we hear the faint patter of a horse's hoofs, far down the road, drawing nearer and nearer, till finally a carriage stopped at the door, and the doctor appeared in our midst.

It must have been an hour later when, as I stood at a little distance behind the others, I saw a quiver pass over Frank's pale lips. Then the gray eyes slowly opened, opened to look into his father's anxious face bending over him. The child gazed upward at first unknowingly, then more consciously, until at last, while wonder grew in his own eyes, he said low, as if amazed:

"Father, is it you?" Then in an awed, yet happy tone, as he looked into his father's loving eyes, he asked:

"Is it heaven? Are we in heaven, father, you and I?" and tried to put his weak arms about his father's neck.

The father gave a low sob, as he placed them there. "My son! my son!" he cried, and for the moment said no more.

"O father!" sighed Frank, happily. Then again, "Is it heaven?" he asked.

"Not yet, my child," answered his father, trying to smile. "I have not lost you yet." And again he drew that sobbing breath.

Frank's half-awakened senses became more alert. Suddenly he seemed to remember what had happened. "Oh," he exclaimed, "I thought I had died in that dreadful place! Did I get through it, then? Where is Laddie? Oh, where is Laddie?" he cried, in a frightened tone.

Quickly from the outskirts of the little circle came a short, emphatic bark, which told where Laddie was, asking, nay, demanding a passage-way to the bed where his loving little master lay. With an eager leap he landed at Frank's side, and would have covered his face with kisses, had not the kind doctor said, "Not yet," and quietly removed him, after Frank's sigh of joy that Laddie was safe.

He seemed to come to himself more and more. "I did n't die, then?" he said, wonderingly. He glanced at his father timidly and in a puzzled fashion, as if unable to understand his changed manner. Then he looked about him at the faces of the others, at the strange doctor, at Madge and his Aunt Margaret. Suddenly he put his hand over his eyes and tried to turn away his head from them all.

"Oh, do n't!" he cried, bursting into tears.

"Please go away, everybody. Oh, where is my friend? I want Miss Agatha."

Instantly they all made way for me, and I passed between them and placed my arms about him. Silently, and with tears, I thanked our Father in heaven that the child of my heart lay there safe in my old arms, my trembling lips pressed close to his pale cheek.

"My little lad," was all I could say, but he heard and kissed me back.

"Yes," he said, with a happy sigh, "you are glad, Miss Agatha, that I did n't die in that horrible place under the ground. Oh, I want to tell you about it, only my head aches so, and I feel weak and queer all over."

"Better not, now, my boy. Wait till to-morrow," said the doctor, gravely. Then he gave him some medicine, bade him turn over and try not to think of anything, but just to go to sleep. Turning to Mr. Sinclair, he said that the child must be left in absolute rest and quietness or he could not answer for the consequences. So, one by one, we turned away and left the dear boy with only his father and the doctor seated in a dim corner of the darkened room, where their presence might not disturb the wearied child, who had obediently closed his eyes and tried to sleep at the doctor's command.

Did any of us eat any breakfast that day? I am sure I cannot tell, and I doubt if one of the

anxious yet happy group gathered upon the porch that bright September morning has now the slightest remembrance of anything that transpired at that eventful time beyond the precincts of Frank's chamber. For myself, I do recall that as soon as I could think of anything beside my joy and thankfulness that Frank had been thus strangely saved from a terrible death, my one thought was for Philip.

Leaving the other members of the household still talking in hushed tones over the marvelous escape and wondering how it could have been accomplished, I went quickly up the stairs to Philip's room.

He was sleeping when I entered, but my coming, gentle as I had intended it to be, must have disturbed his slumber. He moved uneasily, threw his arm up over his head, sighed and then opened his eyes and saw me standing beside him.

He looked at me unthinkingly for a moment, and then the remembrance of all the dreadful events of the day before sprang suddenly into his mind.

"O Miss Agatha!" he cried out, frightened and trembling. But I drew him down on his pillow.

"Listen, my dear," I said. "Be still a minute. O Philip," I cried, "look at me! Do you not see from my face what has happened?" I smiled as brightly as I could upon him.

He looked at me, startled. "What is it, Miss Agatha? What can it be?" he exclaimed, starting up in bed. Then beginning to tremble again, "Miss Agatha, it can't be—oh, is it Frank, Miss Agatha?"

I clasped him in my arms. "Philip," I cried, "think of what you said last night. 'If only my brother Frank could come back to me, I would show him what a good brother I would be.' O Philip, never forget those words; for, my dear, he has come back! God has given you back your brother."

For a moment the boy sat up in his bed staring at me, as if unable to grasp my words, then he flung his arms about me and cried out, "Miss Agatha, Miss Agatha, is he alive? My brother Frank? Is he alive?"

He fell back and flung his face into his pillow, while his whole frame shook with heavy sobs. But it was for joy he cried, and the crying did him no hurt.

Suddenly he sprang up, saying that he must go to Frank. But I would not let him then, and said,

"We must wait a little, dear. Frank cannot see you now. Presently, when he is better, you shall go to him and put your arms around him and tell him how glad you are that he is safe. And if you whisper to him how much you love him and how from this time on you mean to show

what a good brother you can be, I know Frank's own heart will be filled with joy and thankfulness, and you will have done more to make him well than all the doctor's medicine can do."

"So I will, Miss Agatha," declared Philip, with tears running down his cheeks. "For, oh, I do mean it. From this day on he shall see. Miss Agatha, I am going to try to be such a different boy after this; different in every way. If only father will forgive me! Do you think he will? I know Frank will," he said, with an eager thrill in his voice; "he 's always so good."

"Yes, indeed, they 'll both forgive you, Philip, and love you, too. So will we all. How could we help it, my dear boy, when you are going to be good and truthful, honest and brave, from this day forward? And Philip," I whispered, "do n't forget that there is One other, whom you should ask to forgive you, too. When you are all alone by yourself, tell Him all that is in your heart, just what you want to do. Ask Him to help you and make you strong to help yourself. I know He will, Philip."

"I will, I will!" cried Philip. He threw his arms around me and hid his face on my shoulder. "I mean to do it," he said; "and I mean to tell Him I am glad he gave me back my brother."

I saw that the boy was deeply touched, and as I sat by his bedside quietly caressing him and trying to calm his excited nerves, I was hoping

and praying that all this time of trouble might work to some good purpose. Surely, if by means of this day and night of suffering the two brothers might be brought into happier and more loving relations; if Philip might be led to overcome his faults; to grow into the noble and beautiful character we had only to look upon his earnest, lovely young face to feel that he ought to become; if, more than all, the children's father could be brought to see his own grave faults in his treatment of his sons, who could wish the pain blotted out?

As for Philip, I felt that he had all at once become very dear to me. The hours which we had just passed together had broken down the barrier between us. All my old displeasure and misliking were gone. He had found his way to my heart. He could never have Frank's own place there, but I felt that there was room for both. I thought, too, that Philip was growing to love me also, and I did not believe that he would ever again slyly make fun of my old-fashioned ways, or say, as he had once done, "I hate you, you old Miss Agatha."

I sat beside him for an hour or more while we talked about many things. I told him how I had left him in the early dawn, to wander out upon the mountain, how Laddie had so strangely come to meet me, and by means of his quick intelligence and loving anxiety for his young

master, had led us to search for Frank; how the men had fought their way through the brush and brambles of the old ravine, following after Laddie as well as they could, till they had come to a spot where a quantity of stone and rubbish had been thrown out of the mouth of an old shaft from the mine. This shaft, or level, as I believe they called it, although it was not level, but descended at a gentle slope, was at quite a distance from the place where the boys had gone down, and in fact had been so long unused that its very existence was almost forgotten. The entrance was concealed by bushes and vines which overhung it, but when Laddie had boldly plunged in over the mass of "dump" and through the thickest of the brush, and the men, following on, had parted the branches and entered, one after another, they recognized at once that they were in just such a horizontal shaft as the one which the boys had amused themselves by exploring the day before.

It was so dark within the entrance that they could discern nothing until they had hastily cut away the branches which grew about the mouth. Then they could see to follow Laddie, who ran leaping and barking before them for several rods.

Soon they came to a place where a great mass of stone obstructed the way. Laddie clambered over this, though with much difficulty, and made

his way to a point where he squeezed himself through between the top of the heap of stones and the roof of the shaft. Here the men had halted in dismay. It seemed impossible to go on, but Laddie, who discovered that they were not following him, came back through the narrow opening and urged and implored them to come, rushing over the stones to them, barking, whining, licking their feet, begging them by every means in his power to follow.

Then the men fell to with a right good will, and began dislodging the stones. One after another they threw down those which they could lift, and pushed at the others till they were loosened from their hold. In this manner they had made a passageway wide enough to crawl through on hands and knees, and passing completely over the obstruction found themselves once more in the open shaft. Here at the foot of the heap of stones lay Frank, white and still as if in death.

At the first moment they had all believed him dead, but Mr. Sinclair, with a sharp cry, had pressed forward, and flinging himself down beside the child, had bent his ear to Frank's chest to listen for the beating of his heart.

"He lives! Thank God!" he cried, the next moment. "Let us hurry to the air and light."

The strong men, with willing hands and feet, had worked to make the passage yet wider, that

the unconscious child might be safely borne without injury from his dark prison vault to the life-giving air and sunlight above.

I told Philip how I had stood with Madge and the others upon the mountainside and had watched the little procession approach; how my heart had leaped in my bosom for joy when I saw that Frank was found, only to sink with dread as they drew nearer and I gazed upon the white, deathlike face and the limp hand that hung helplessly at his side.

"But he was not dead," I cried. "He is alive and safe and has spoken to us all. Please God, all will soon be well."

"Oh, I hope so," said Philip. After a little pause he continued, "What a strange place to find him in, so far from the mine! How could he have got there in that terrible, dark place? Oh, how he must have felt to be in such a place as that!" he exclaimed with a shudder.

"That is the mystery," I answered, "and we can none of us solve it. But Frank will tell us when he is able. We must wait till then."

"To think of how he must have felt to be there, Miss Agatha! It seems so horrible. But Frank could stand it better than any one else, because he is so brave." He spoke with a thrill in his voice, which showed that he was proud of his brother.

"Let us go now, Miss Agatha," he begged. "I can't wait any longer."

"Yes, my dear. Get up and dress quickly. Come to my room when you are ready, and we will see if they will let us go to Frank."

But when we went together to the bedroom door, it opened hurriedly and Mr. Sinclair came out.

"O father!" cried Philip, with all his old impetuosity. But suddenly he thought of what had passed between his father and himself the night before. He faltered, hung back and dropped his head. "O father," he said again sadly, "father, won't you forgive me?"

Mr. Sinclair stooped down, lifted the boy in his arms and kissed him silently.

"Yes, my son," he said simply.

"Father, may I see Frank? I want to speak to him."

"Yes, Philip, you may see him," he replied, and I saw that he was deeply agitated, "but he cannot speak to you, my son. He is very, very ill."

CHAPTER XVII

FRANK'S ILLNESS

How suddenly our new-found hopes were fled and all our joy turned to grief and fear by these terrible tidings! Frank was very ill, wildly delirious with fever and in the gravest danger. How mistaken we had been but one short hour before when we had thought he had only to rest and recover his strength, to become his own self again! Could it be that we must lose him after all?

But I would not believe this. When I thought of how he had lived through all the terrors of that dreadful mine, it seemed to me that the kind Father of all meant to spare him to us now. I was sure of it, though I could scarcely have told why I felt so positive. Through all the long, anxious days which followed, when we saw the fever mount higher and higher and listened to the wild ramblings of the disordered brain, I never lost that faith. Even when the doctor himself seemed to lose all hope, I still believed that Frank would live.

And live he did; but not until after weeks of pain and suffering on his part and of deep anxiety

on ours. What long, sad hours those were when his father and I sat silently watching on either side of his bed! Not that the others were far away; but somehow, even in his deepest delirium, when he knew nothing of what went on around him, Frank seemed to cling to his father and me, to be restless and in distress if his Aunt Margaret, or even Madge, sat beside him. His aunt meant to be kind, and would have done anything in her power for his comfort, but even in his wildest wanderings the habits of his whole life were strong upon him, and he could not change them if he would.

So it came about that his father, to whose tender touch and gentle voice he always responded though he could not know him, and I myself, with whom in his rambling way he held long conversations not knowing what he said, and holding my hand the while, it came about, I say, that we two were oftenest with him.

Many a time as we sat and listened, I thought how hard it must be for the father to hear this talk, incoherent as it was. Sometimes the poor boy would start up in his bed crying,

"Father, don't! Don't punish me again! Oh, I didn't shoot the horse! . . . I told them," he would mutter, "that I didn't know who shot the horse and I didn't want to know, and I didn't really and truly know, because I didn't see it, but, oh, I thought it was Philip!

. . . No, Miss Agatha," he would go on, "I can't stop with you. No, no. You'd be sure to find out who it was, and I will not tell of my brother. I will not, I will not!"

Then again: "O father, it hurts, but I'd bear it all if you'd only look at me sometimes as you do at Philip. Don't be ashamed of me, father! . . . Philip, you don't get that line right: '*Stormed* at with shot and shell,' not '*stoned* at.' How silly that would be! . . . There goes father, Laddie. He's got his arm around Phil's shoulder. O Laddie, what would we give if he'd walk that way with us! But he never will, he never will. . . . What makes my head feel so queer, I wonder?"

Thus he would ramble on, sometimes in a loud, clear voice so that any one might hear, and again with a confused murmur of which we could distinguish no word. And the poor father heard it all and, as I well knew, pondered many things in his heart.

Day by day, as he sat by Frank's bedside, the past was being made clear to him. I could see with what shame and distress he reviewed his own part therein. More than once, as I leaned back in my dim corner, I beheld the strong man, forgetting my presence, cover his face with his hands and sob, as he listened to the pleadings of his child that he, even *he*, might receive a share of his father's love.

"Don't give Philip all," Frank would say; "give me a little, father."

Then the father, with his eyes full of tears, would bend and kiss the boy's flushed, unconscious face, longing to make him understand that the love had come at last, fearing that it might be too late.

It was in these long hours beside our little sufferer's bedside, that Mr. Sinclair and I became friends. As I learned to know him I saw more plainly how easily it had come about that poor Frank had been so completely misunderstood by the father who should have found his chief pride in a son of such noble traits.

"But I never knew him as he really is," he declared, one day. "From his infancy I have supposed him to be actually weak in intellect. I thought he could not learn like other children. It is true that several times since we have been here at Glen Elsworth, I have observed a brighter expression on his face and have even seen him talking merrily with the other boys. I wondered what it could mean, and perhaps if the sprightliness had lasted I might have discovered the real Frank sooner, but after that affair of the horse, he fell back into his old, sullen manner again, and I concluded that the change I thought I had noticed must have been fancy. As for all this story-making of which you tell me and the helping of Philip with his lessons and so forth, I as-

sure you it has been entirely unknown to me. I never dreamed the boy was bright enough for that.

"The fact is, I am away from my home much of the time, and sometimes see my children only at long intervals. I fear I have never studied their characters so closely as I should have done. I have taken too much for granted. Philip and Madge, by their bright intelligence, have fed my pride and my love, while Frank, through his shyness and reserve has been totally unknown to me. Now that I understand him better I cannot tell how I could have been so blind, how I could have failed to find the child's loving nature in spite of his outward manner. But I never did find it, and indeed knew him so little that I did not dream he could care for me as I now know he does."

When Mr. Sinclair opened his heart to me in this frank fashion, I felt that the opportunity for which I had sought so long had come. I could tell him how mistaken, in my estimation, the whole education of the children had been. If I spoke somewhat warmly of the share his sister had borne in that education, I hope it was in no spirit of malice. I felt that he ought to know how cruel and unjust the treatment of his aunt had been to Frank, and how full of peril to Philip also. I did not hesitate to speak my mind freely and plainly, and at the close of our conversation I could see that, though Mr. Sinclair said little,

he was making the matter the subject of serious thought.

Though my heart beat a little at my temerity, I felt glad that I had been able to say what I wished, and as I took my place again at Frank's bedside and ministered to his wants, I hoped most earnestly that good might come of it.

There came a day at last when we could say that the worst was over. The fever subsided; a long, refreshing sleep fell upon the tired brain; and when Frank waked it was to recognize his father bending over him. He was weak and exhausted, it is true, but in his right mind at last.

I can never forget that first conscious look with which he gazed into his father's eyes. A faint flush came to his wasted face and an expression of doubt and astonishment. "Father," he said at length, tenderly and in his weak whisper, "what is it?" But his father, for all answer, placed his arms about the boy and drew him to his breast.

I turned away and fled from the room. It was not for me to look upon that first meeting between the two. But, ah, how my heart was beating for joy, as I wandered away by myself, to think that at last Frank's good time was come! At last all the weary longing and waiting were over and gone, and my little lad had found his place, his own warm, sheltered corner, in his father's heart!

How long they talked together or what they said I never knew. But when Mr. Sinclair came to me afterward, saying, "The boy wants you, Miss Agatha," there was a tender, happy look on his face which told me that all was well between the father and son.

Then I went quickly to my boy's room. What a happy little face, pale and wasted as it was, lay on the pillow there! What eager arms were raised to clasp my neck, and what a bright smile met my own!

"O Miss Agatha," said the child in his weak voice, trying to raise his head as I came up to him, "do you know about it? about my father and me, Miss Agatha?" in a hushed, happy whisper. "He's my own father, now."

"Yes, dear," I whispered back, as I placed his head upon his pillow, "he is your own father now and you are his dear son. Everything is right at last. Your old friend is so glad for you both, my dear."

"Yes, Miss Agatha," he said, putting up his hand to pat my face affectionately. Then after a little pause, "Oh, I'm glad, glad it all happened, though it seemed hard then!

"Miss Agatha," he went on, "I want to tell you about that dreadful place I was in. I wanted to tell my father too, but he said to wait till I am stronger. But I shall soon be strong enough for anything now," trying to speak out bravely,

though his voice sounded faint and uncertain, "because I'm so happy, you know, and that will make me well in no time."

It was some little time before Frank was well, for all his brave talk, but still it was astonishing how quickly he grew better. Indeed, within the next day or two he was strong enough to tell us what we had so much wished to know—how he had contrived to escape from the mine and find his way into the dark tunnel so far from the spot where the boys had left him, as they supposed, to die, on that dreadful day.

"I can't tell you how hard it seemed to watch the bucket going up, up, and know I was left behind," he said, as he lay comfortably on his pillow with his hand clasped tightly in his father's. "Oh, when I think of it all, it does seem as if I could n't be here in my bed, alive and safe and so happy!" He looked shyly and affectionately at his father, as he spoke the last words, as if to assure himself that it was no dream that he, himself, the little outcast, was lying there sheltered and warmed by the tender affection of his beloved father and of all the other friends about him. "I thought I was going to be drowned, you know," he said simply. "The water kept pouring in faster and faster, and then it came up over my feet. I climbed up onto a pile of rocks and stood there with Laddie in my arms, but the water came higher and higher, till it was

over my knees. Poor Laddie was trembling and whining, for he was frightened too, and all at once he sprang out of my arms right back of me. I turned round and saw him standing in an opening in the rocks just above my head.

"I climbed up there after him as well as I could. It was a kind of tunnel-like place, all dark inside, but there was plenty of room to stand there, and it was out of the water. But by and by the water began to rush in there, too, and we had to keep stepping on ahead of it. The ground was rough and jagged, and it grew darker and darker as we went on, but we could hear the water coming after us, and that made us hurry on. We seemed to be going up hill all the time, and by and by the water stopped coming. But as we went on the tunnel got smaller and full of rubbish, and I could n't stand up any more, but had to creep along on my hands and knees.

"That was when it began to seem so dreadful," said poor Frank. "It was all stuffy and close. I could hardly breathe, and I did n't know what to do. I knew I could n't turn back, for there was the water behind us, and I did n't feel as if I could creep on farther and farther into the earth, where there was no air and no light and nothing but sharp stones that hit against my face and hands as I scrambled over them. Sometimes I thought I could n't go on, as it grew harder to

squeeze through the stones, but Laddie kept urging me and so I 'd try again. I do n't know what made me, for I did n't think we could ever get out. I felt as if we were going deeper and deeper into the ground, and yet I seemed to feel that it was up hill all the time. Sometimes Laddie would go on far ahead, and then I 'd think he 'd left me there to die alone, but he always came back and barked and urged me to come on. So then I 'd try it again.

"I do n't know how long we went on in this way. It seemed a long, long time to me, and I grew so tired and weak that I had to stop to rest. Sometimes Laddie would wait for me and sometimes he 'd go on ahead, but he 'd always come back and tell me to try again. It was so dark I could n't see him, but he 'd come up close and bark and try to push me with his nose, the way he does, you know.

"By and by we came to a dreadful place, worse than all the rest. I got into it, but it was such a small opening I could n't get through. I tried to go back, but some stones had tumbled down behind me just after I had squeezed through, and I could n't get back. There I was, and I thought I must stay there and die.

"I do n't know what happened then. I think I must have fainted or something. The next thing I knew I felt Laddie pulling at my blouse and trying to make me move on. He had found a

new opening in the stones somewhere, and we squeezed through. Then we went on and on till we came to another place where we could n't get any farther, and that 's all I seem to remember, till I found myself here in father's bed. Oh, you do n't know what a queer feeling it is to go to sleep in such a place as that and wake up here! It seems as if it must have been a horrible dream I had. Or is this the dream?"

"No, indeed, you are wide awake now, my boy," said his father earnestly and clasping him close—"my brave boy, who has been through peril which would have made the heart of any strong man quail!"

"And it was for me, father, that he did it," cried Philip. "O Frank," he said, throwing himself on the bed beside his brother and clasping his arms about him, "O Frank, can you ever forgive me for all I 've made you suffer? O Frank" ——

But Frank, turning his face to his brother, put up his weak, trembling hand against the other's lips. "Do n't, Phil," he said, "do n't cry. I can't bear it. Do n't you see how happy I am about it all? Why, I 'm glad it happened! I feel as if we 'd been given to each other all over again. And we are going to make things so different now, are n't we, Phil?"

"You 'd better believe we are," said Phil, brightening, but with his voice trembling still.

"You know, Frank, what kind of a brother I mean to be now. You know what I said yesterday."

For the two brothers had had a talk together the day before, as long a one as the doctor would permit, in which poor Philip must have poured out his whole sorrowful, repentant and grateful heart to his brother, judging from the happy, contented look which I had seen upon their faces when I entered Frank's room afterward and found them lying side by side with their arms clasped around each other.

After this all went well with our invalid. Each day we could see that he gained in strength, though at first the progress was slow. It was indeed a pleasant sight to see him with his father and Philip now, and one which I never tired of witnessing. He often lay with his hand in his father's, listening to Philip, perched upon the foot of the bed, where he poured forth his eager chatter as brightly as ever. There was a new expression in Mr. Sinclair's eyes, as he smiled at Philip's jokes and then glanced at the face of the boy on the bed. It was a tender look which needed no words to tell how well the lesson he had just received was learned. Whatever the coming years might bring to Frank, I knew his father's steadfast love would never fail him now, and that never again would the latter feel that pang of self-pity which had once led him, in my

hearing, to regret that the lame boy had been named for him.

Frank laughed merrily enough at Philip's fun, and occasionally joined in with a shy word or two. It was but a word or two, however, for he had not yet learned to speak in his father's presence with that freedom and light-hearted carelessness which Philip had known all his life. But that would come in time, and, meanwhile, they were all three so happy together, each in his own way, that, as I have said, it was a pleasure to see them.

Nor did Frank lack for other visitors. Madge was always flying in and out of the sick-room, trying, in her bright, cheery fashion, to interest and amuse her brother, endeavoring by every means in her power to make up to him for the loss of the sisterly affection which should have been his years before. She knew now how wrong her judgment had been, how utterly she had mistaken his character, and little by little, as the days went on, she was learning to know and love him as he deserved.

Mrs. Archer, too, never failed in her daily call upon the invalid. The calls were not very long, nor were they pleasant, it is to be feared, to either the aunt or the nephew. Frank could not feel at ease with his Aunt Margaret, though I could see that he really endeavored to be so, while she, though she wished to do what she con-

sidered her duty by the child, could not even now, after all he had suffered, force herself to feel for him any real affection.

Besides, though the haughty lady would have scorned to make any exhibition of her resentment in public, it was evident to me that her brother had given her deep offense. What Mr. Sinclair may have said to her in regard to her mistaken treatment of his sons, I never heard, but it must have been something sternly to the point, and something, too, which caused her deep anger and humiliation. Her manner became quite changed toward him, and even with Madge and Philip she no longer allowed her old affection to manifest itself. She held herself proudly aloof from them all, shutting herself up in her own room as much as possible, and, aside from the brief visit to Frank's room every day, made for duty's sake, seeing as little as she could of anybody.

Toward me, her manner became more icy than it had ever been, and in fact, from that time till the day of her departure, she never deigned to address even the slightest word to me or to show that she was at any time aware of my presence, except for the coldest possible nod of greeting with which she favored me when I occasionally passed her in the halls.

Of course this extreme hauteur showed plainly, as no doubt it was intended to do, the opinion

Mrs. Archer held in regard to my part in the recent events, but as I felt a consciousness that I had done only what seemed right and necessary, I bore her displeasure with considerable equanimity.

However, if Frank saw little of his aunt there were plenty of other people coming and going about him, as soon as he was able to bear it. Of course, Ralph, who had shown deep feeling when he, like every one else, had believed Frank to be drowned in the mine, and who was now thankful to have his friend restored to him, was often in the sick-room trying to enliven Frank's dull hours with his funny nonsense, his drawings and the like. I am not sure that there was not at times some very serious talk interspersed with the fun, and I know that the bond of friendship between the two boys became very close.

Then all the other members of the household seemed to vie with each other as to who should perform for Frank the quickest and gladdest service. Everybody now knew the right story about the horse. Philip had made sure of that. With his father to sustain him he had gone manfully to Mrs. Dale and John and had told them everything which had happened in regard to poor Prince Charlie.

The confession had been a difficult one for Philip to make, but he had made it truthfully and bravely, and had found himself, as generally

happens, not only happier after the trial was over, but strengthened in his good intentions by the full forgiveness and approval of all the persons concerned. Indeed, I think that everybody loved Philip better after his brave confession of his faults than they had done before when they thought he had no faults.

But while Philip had lost nothing in his friends' affections through the knowledge of his fall, Frank had gained everything; for all now knew how he had shielded his brother, not only in regard to "Prince Charlie" but in a hundred other ways, and were swift to recognize his heroism in saving his brother at the risk of his own life. And as they came about him and tried to make acquaintance, with evidences of friendliness to which he responded in his own shy fashion, they wondered how they could ever have called him dull or sullen, forgetting that he had been the latter at least and that it was only a little kindness and love which had wrought the change. They were in and out of his room a dozen times a day, from the Dales and the Todds down to little Saint and Sinner, who were always hanging about the door, peeping in with sharp curiosity, eager to find something to do, "to dribe off dat fly," or to "sabe steps for gran."

Old Uncle Jone came puffing slowly up the stairs every morning to see how the sick boy was and to bring him some woodsy thing to re-

mind him of his old haunts or perhaps to give him the latest information with regard to the health of "Old Bloatie" the frog, or of the little school of fish, all of which pets had fallen to Uncle Jone's faithful charge. The old man never could do or say enough to manifest his admiration for the heroism the boy had shown.

"I 'clar," he said one morning to Frank's father, "'t ain't eb'ry day you-all can fin' a boy like dat-a-one. Dey doan' grow on eb'ry bush now, dey doan'. Leastways, not to my knowin's ob. Yo' take car' ob dat boy, boss, now yo' done got him back again. He needs good car', dat boy. Yo' won't be sorry 'bout him yet. Bress his heart! Chil'un dey hab dey own troubles, but I hope he doan' go ter hab no mo'. Bress him! He sabed his brudder's life, he did."

Then the good old man, after this plain speaking, hobbled down-stairs, wiping his eyes and blowing his nose vigorously as he went.

As for Aunt Mimy, she was in her element as soon as Frank began to mend, for she could then spend all her spare time contriving little dishes of good things to tempt his slowly returning appetite. Her broad, fat face would beam with delight and her eyes would twinkle as she appeared in the doorway with a morsel of tender quail browned to a turn, or a dish of delicate custard to please the boy's fancy.

"Bress de chile," she would say, "'t won't

do him a mite ob harm. Po' little starved chicken! No mo' flesh on his bones den dar is on my pipe-stem, an' no mo' color in his face, needer. You-all let Aunt Mimy git to work. She 'll soon hab him fed up right. On'y, honey, doan' yer let dat ar brudder ob yo's eat it up now, nor little Redhead, needer. Dey 's bof out dar jes' ready ter grab it. Yo' eat it all up now, eb'ry bit ob it, jes' ter please Aunt Mimy. Now do, honey."

And Frank, partly to please the good old cook, and partly because with boyish mischief he was ready to do his part toward saving the dainties from the two hungry boys, whom he could see casting longing glances from the hall door upon his treasures, would obediently swallow as much as he could, laughing, meanwhile, at the dismayed faces in the doorway.

For it was true that Philip and Ralph both paid great court to Aunt Mimy in these days, and faithfully followed her about from kitchen to chamber whenever Frank's meal-times came around. At first they had fallen heirs to most of the delicacies which Frank had been unable to eat, but as he became convalescent they had found fewer opportunities to indulge in such delights, until finally he had attained to a substantial appetite of his own and had grown to appreciate Aunt Mimy's cooking to such an extent that they were no longer able to gather up even a crumb.

Accordingly, it is not to be wondered at that they resorted to all sorts of pranks and jokes to avenge themselves in a merry way on Aunt Mimy for giving all the good things to Frank, and on Frank for eating them "down to the bare egg-shells and potato skins," as they indignantly declared. But it was such good-natured malice that the chief victims did not mind it in the least. When Frank found a caterpillar or an enterprising young crawfish snugly rolled up in the folds of his napkin, he only laughed gleefully and carefully preserved the little prisoner till he could retaliate by suddenly springing it upon its unsuspecting original owners. It was the same way with Aunt Mimy in the kitchen. When a toad frantically jumped out of a bowl into her face, she would simply toss her head and give a sniff of disdain, and when her attention was called to an immense picture of herself neatly pinned to her back, she would only chuckle good-naturedly and say, "Dat 's some mo' dat little Redhead's nonsense."

It is but justice to the boys to say that the jokes were harmless in these days, far different from some that had been perpetrated earlier in the season. Indeed, the two found their sweetest revenge in the making of funny pictures, which they freely scattered from kitchen to garret. They even went so far, upon a certain occasion, as to thrust an enormous piece of pasteboard

fastened to a long pole, up through Frank's window and on into the room till it paused in its precipitate career under the very nose of the grave and dignified doctor himself, who looked considerably astonished at the advent of the strange visitant.

Upon the pasteboard was quite a striking representation of Frank sitting up in his bed, hungrily gazing at something on a platter borne in the hands of Aunt Mimy, who appeared in the door with a triumphant smile which stretched from ear to ear. On either side of her were her little grandchildren, each armed with a great spoon with which they were busily engaged in "shooing" away two large roosters with heads and faces bearing a strong resemblance to Masters Philip and Ralph themselves. It was a comical picture, and made even the doctor laugh heartily, when he recovered from his surprise at its sudden entrance, though he said that the joke appeared to be on the young gentlemen themselves, rather than on Frank or Aunt Mimy.

Thus after the long days of watching and weary waiting about our boy's bedside, there came a pleasant time when we were all at ease and happy together. The danger was over; our hearts were lightened of their heavy load and we could once more afford to laugh and be merry.

CHAPTER XVIII

CONCLUSION

THERE comes an end to all good things, and so to us came all too soon the end of our pleasant sojourn together at lovely Glen Elsworth. For autumn winds were beginning to remind us of our own homes and the duties awaiting us there.

The first break in our little circle came when Mrs. Archer departed, taking with her Madge and Philip. It was wiser, their father thought, that the two children should be at home attending to their school work, and as Frank, though still unable to endure the journey, was rapidly recovering, there seemed no longer any need of their remaining at Glen Elsworth.

Still, they were reluctant to go, and Philip, especially, clung to his brother at the last with many tears. He knew that it was to be more than a few weeks' parting between Frank and himself, for by this time it had been definitely arranged that as soon as Frank should be strong enough to travel, he was to accompany me to my own home, there to remain as my beloved guest for a visit to which no limit had as yet been set.

It had all come about as I had hoped it would. In some of our long talks together I had per-

suaded Mr. Sinclair that it was wiser that the boys should be separated for a time. True, they were loving brothers now, and we hoped would always remain so, but it seemed best that each should live without the other till Philip should learn to rely upon himself, and gain strength to fight his own childish terrors and "bear his own blows" which his brother had too often borne for him. And certainly it was better that Frank should be removed from his old home influences, from his aunt, even from his sister, and from all his old associates, until he, too, amid new scenes and new friends, could learn to look at life from a different standpoint, till those newer, gentler traits of character which we noted so thankfully from day to day, should have time to grow; in short, till the old, sullen-faced boy should completely vanish, and in his place should stand a brighter, happier, better Frank than anybody had ever known.

So we let Philip go. But though, as I have said, it was hard for the brothers to separate, their parting was not all in sorrow; for had they not the promise that the next long vacation should be spent together at my home? Yes, and Ralph was looking forward to the happy time when he should be there also with his dear young friends.

"I tell you, Miss Agatha," he said, "I know there never was anybody as good as you. It's

so jolly of you to ask me to come and see you. Come? Of course I'll come! If I could n't get there any other way I 'd go on foot. Oh, do n't I know what high old times we 'll have?—horses to ride, and boats on the river and all that. Oh, I'll come fast enough! Nobody need worry about that."

It was in this enthusiastic fashion that my young harum-scarum friend had accepted my cordial invitation to visit Frank and Philip the coming summer, subject to his mother's approval, of course, which we found it not hard to obtain. Indeed, Mrs. Todd entered so heartily into my plan for her boy's pleasure, that, when the turn for the Todd family came to say good-bye to us who remained behind, Ralph was not so wholly cast down as might have been expected.

Then we, Mr. Sinclair, Frank and I, yes, and Laddie, of course, settled down for a little further waiting, till finally, one sharp, clear morning in late October, the old coach for the third time lumbered up to the front door to await another series of leave-takings, this time between the Dales and the last of their summer guests, three quiet people, to say nothing of one small dog, who with love and thanks to those they left behind them, and with grateful hearts for the blessings gained and the lessons learned in that mountain home, set forth upon their homeward journey.

* * * * * *

A year has come and gone since we bore our invalid boy over the rough mountain roads that October day, and carried him by slow degrees to his own place in my far-away home. There he has remained to this present time; and I need scarcely say that the bond between my little lad and me has only grown the stronger as the days have gone by.

Who seeing him now would recognize in the strong, well-grown boy, with bright, alert face and genial smile, that sullen, downcast Frank whom we first met upon a certain rough and perilous journey that I, at least, can never forget? From the very first, the dear boy felt himself at home in my house and heart, and it was marvelous to see the good which that feeling quickly wrought in his sensitive nature. As soon as he was strong enough to bear it, I provided a good tutor for him, a kind-hearted, judicious teacher who could thoroughly understand his nature and needs, and before the first month had passed the two had become devoted friends, and Frank has already shown such progress in his studies as to fully prove him far removed from the dull boy he had once been called.

Gradually we drew about him the companionship of several other boys of his own age, boys of gentle natures and kind hearts, that he might not lack the incentive either in his studies or his play which such companionship brings. It was

gratifying to see how the sensitive child, who would once have shrunk from children of his own age, soon learned to hold his own among them, and how in all their pursuits, whether in school or outdoor life, in riding or rowing, or any games in which Frank's lameness would permit him to take part, he became as free and careless and light-hearted as any of them.

Thus the months rolled by till the summer vacation came, and brought with it the longed-for meeting between Frank and his father and brother.

At last my fond hopes were realized, when I saw Mr. Sinclair clasp Frank in his arms, and then, putting the boy from him, scan him with the same look of pride in his eyes which, in the old days, had been given to Philip alone. And well might he be proud of him, lame and near-sighted though he still was. For Frank had grown sturdy and strong in this last year, and though not yet so tall as Philip, bade fair to become so in another twelve months. Then his face was so sunshiny and his smile so sweet as he looked shyly into his father's eyes—ah, who could help a thrill of pride in such a son as that! Not Mr. Sinclair, as I could see.

His eyes turned to Frank again and again through all the happy confusion of the brothers' greetings.

"Dear friend," he asked, "how have you

made him like this? What has wrought the change?"

"Love and sympathy have done it all," I answered. "He needed nothing more."

"He shall have both while I live," said his father earnestly. Then he added with a little break in his voice, "He looks more like Philip, but most of all he is like his mother."

But the meeting of the young people was merry enough to offset any display of emotion on the father's part. Not only were the brothers in a state of joyous excitement at being together once more, but a later train having brought Ralph Todd upon the scene, my old house fairly rang with mirth and jollity from that time on through all the long vacation.

How they rushed about from garret to cellar with Laddie leaping and yelping among them, and fairly shaking himself out of his skin from pure delight, as the boys declared! How they fished and hunted and boated and rode! It would make another story as long as this if I were to tell the doings of the three boys and their mates through that summer vacation. I must not attempt it, but only say that through all the nonsense and glee, the noise and confusion which reigned supreme for ten long weeks, I still could see the change I had so often wished for in my two young friends, Philip and Ralph.

They were as bright and merry as ever, but

Philip told no more of his wonderful stories, or even once tried to shield himself behind his brother. I knew that he was trying to be brave and truthful, and that he had never forgotten the sharp lesson he had learned in the mountains.

And Ralph, though he was as full of tricks as ever, and kept everybody in a chronic state of anxiety for the safety of his life and limbs in his many misadventures, was also changed. His mischief was never malicious now as it had been in the old days, and I believed he still kept those "feelings" with him which he had found on a certain memorable day on the top of Mount Eyre.

Indeed, they are both good boys, and very dear to me. If Frank holds the first place in my affections it is not surprising. Frank is the child of my heart. When I mark the change in him which even this brief year has made, I am filled with joy that it was given to me to aid even in a small way in bringing about that change.

I cannot be sure that he has yet learned to love his Aunt Margaret, but I believe that even that may come in time, and at all events, he is not likely to see much of that proud lady in the future. She has been traveling abroad with friends during the last year, and lately a report has come to us that she is about to marry there. I hope it is true, for surely the three children are better off without her.

As for Frank's mind, about which there was once so much discussion, his teacher tells me that he is often surprised at the boy's insight into human nature, at his fertile imagination and his ready pen. I always thought that gift for story-telling must mean something, and though Frank is still very young and we cannot tell what the future may have in store for him, I often please myself with the thought that, after all, it may be he who will sometime add luster to the name of Sinclair, and that the day may come when his father will rejoice that it was the little lame boy who had his own name, Francis, bestowed upon him.

But whether these bright dreams of mine come to pass or not, it will not greatly matter, for in so far as I am able, I mean to look out for my boy's future. Yes, Aunt Margaret was quite right there. I shall certainly do what I can for Frank. Why should I not, when, as I have said, he is the child of my heart? There are others who are dear to me, but none so dear as he. It would be strange indeed if I should neglect to do anything which may be in my power to brighten his future life when I am dead and gone.

And now there remains nothing to say except to mention a certain grand scheme which I and my young friends, Philip and Frank, have in view for the coming summer. If nothing happens to

prevent, we propose to go abroad for two long years of study and travel. Mr. Sinclair has quite agreed to this, and we are looking forward to our sojourn in foreign lands with the deepest interest. At present I am trying to make up my mind whether to take Ralph Todd also. I know he wishes it, and Frank and Philip wish it. His mother, too, would be entirely willing that he should go. But do I dare to take the responsibility of keeping such a merry rogue as Ralph in order?

However, Frank's tutor is to go with us to teach the boys, and I shall have my niece with me, to say nothing of a trustworthy maid, and it will be strange if we three cannot manage three small boys, even if one of them is something of a madcap.

So, after all, I think I shall let my own heart decide the matter, and that says that Ralph ought to go.

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